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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT
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PIERS PLOWMAN AND FOURTEENTH CENTURY ECCLESIOLOGY

by

Charles Daniel Crews

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
1978

Approved by

Walter H. Beale

Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Adviser Walter H. Burke

Committee Members Walter H. Burke
Robert L. Kelly
James C. Weinstein
Charles P.R. Fischer
Ronald G. Ramsey

20 March 1978
Date of Acceptance by Committee

31 March 1978
Date of Final Oral Examination

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Near the opening of Piers Plowman the Dreamer encounters Lady Holy Church, whose response to the question: "How may I save my soul?" truly sets the action of the poem in motion. Likewise at the poem's end it is the siege and betrayal of "Unity," the Church, which necessitates the final pilgrimage of Conscience in search of Piers. Throughout the tortuous middle sections of the work, the Church, or its representatives, constantly interact with the Dreamer for the furtherance or hindrance of his quest. All this suggests that the author's view of the Church, his ecclesiology, occupies a crucial position within the work, and that a careful study of this element of his thought and its background may provide essential information for grappling with questions of the poem's structure and meaning.

After reviewing previous scholarship and introductory matters in Chapter I, this study in Chapter II considers traditional views of the Church as expressed by Augustine and Aquinas which helped to establish the position of the hierarchical Church as the authoritative guide for salvation. Chapter III considers the ecclesiological situation of the fourteenth century, and shows that a series of circumstances and issues had combined to present the Church with a "crisis of authority" which called its nature into

question: prelatical abuses, division in the Church, the efficacy of the sacraments, free-will and predestination, and the concept of Dominion. In discussing these issues, the positions of Ockham, Fitzralph, Brinton, Uthred of Boldon, Bradwardine, and Wycliffe receive particular attention. Chapter IV examines the role of the Church in Dante's Commedia, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, and Gower's Vox Clamantis. These chapters do not attempt to pinpoint specific sources of Langland's views on the Church, but rather show the diversity of ecclesiological positions in his day and how these matters were utilized in contemporary works of imaginative literature.

The remaining chapters (V-VIII) concentrate upon Piers Plowman itself, applying the results of these background investigations to a close reading of Langland's use of the Church within his poem. Here the approach is to concentrate upon specific passages where the question of Langland's ecclesiology is especially significant: The Teaching of Holy Church, Piers' Pardon, Clergy's Feast, The Founding of Holy Church, and The Castle of Unity. This investigation culminates in the final quest of Conscience for Piers, with its attendant questions: Is Piers the heavenly Church or an earthly representative, salvation in heaven, or an ideal Church to be established on earth?

In the final analysis, Langland is found to reflect several of the streams of fourteenth century ecclesiological

thought. He desires the hierarchical Church to fulfill its ideal, but is forced to stand alone before God as the poem ends. In a sense he anticipates the Reformation, but he greatly desires a rejuvenation of the faith and Church of the Middle Ages. Herein lies the source of many of the tensions and apparent confusions within the thought and structure of Piers Plowman, but herein too lies much of its appeal to modern man, who like Langland is often faced with a conflict of authorities and values as he searches for the meaning and goal of life.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

APPROVAL PAGE ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. BACKGROUNDS IN ECCLESIOLOGY: THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH 14

Introduction 14
The Human Condition from a Christian Perspective. 15
The Role of the Church in the Scheme of Salvation. 19
Traditional Views of the Church: St. Augustine. 21
Traditional Views of the Church: Thomas Aquinas 32
Conclusion: The Church as Authority . . . 40

III. THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY CRISIS IN ECCLESIOLOGY AND AUTHORITY 42

Introduction 42
Ockham and the Shaking of the Foundations. 44
Prelatical Abuses: Spirituality and Worldly Gain 51
Division in the Church: The Friars and the Schism 63
The Efficacy of the Sacraments 76
Free-Will and Predestination 85
The Concept of Dominion. 96
Conclusion 103

IV. ECCLESIOLOGY IN IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE 108

Introduction 108
Dante. 109
Chaucer. 129
Gower. 153
Conclusion 172

Page

CHAPTER

V. THE VISIO: WILL, PIERS, AND LADY HOLY CHURCH. 175

VI. THE CHURCH ON EARTH: DOWEL, DOBET, AND THE BEGINNING OF DOBEST. 203

VII. LANGLAND AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS . . . 228

VIII. THE FINAL QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR PIERS 263

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 286

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Near the opening of Piers Plowman the Dreamer encounters the first of the many guides who attempt to aid him on his long and arduous spiritual pilgrimage. This is the beautiful and mysterious Lady Holy Church, whose response to the question "How may I save my soul?" truly sets the action of the poem in motion after the panoramic vision of the opening lines. Likewise at the poem's end it is the siege and betrayal of Unity, the Church, which necessitates the final, and perhaps eternal, pilgrimage of Conscience in search of Piers. Throughout the tortuous middle sections of the work, the Church, or the Church's representatives, constantly appear and interact with the Dreamer for the furtherance or hindrance of his quest. All this suggests that the author's view of the Church, his ecclesiology as expressed in the poem, occupies a crucial position within the work, and that a careful study of this element of his thought may provide essential information for grappling with the question of the poem's meaning, a thorny issue which every reader must confront.

Before proceeding further, I should perhaps clarify the meaning of "ecclesiology." In its broadest sense, this is the branch of theology which deals with the study of the

nature, function, and organization of the Church in all its aspects. In this dissertation I am particularly interested in ecclesiology as it relates to questions of the authority of the organizational Church on earth and its fulfillment or nonfulfillment of its mission as the guide for mankind in attaining salvation. It is as they affect these principal concerns that related issues, such as sacramental theology and theories of predestination, will be considered.

Previous studies, it is true, have devoted some attention to Langland's ecclesiology. Scholars could hardly overlook so obvious a point in a work which refers to the Church in so many places as does Piers Plowman. It is well known that the English Reformers of the sixteenth century read with satisfaction the poet's strictures upon the medieval Catholic Church, and, assuming that Langland's idea of the Church was in accord with theirs, claimed him as one of their own. Similar readings of the poem had already produced such Wycliffite works as Peirce the Ploughman's Crede.[1] In the nineteenth century, in the introduction to his great edition of the poem, Walter Skeat noted that some scholars, principally Dr. Whitaker and Dean Milman, had called this earlier view into question and had suggested that Langland was far more a medieval Catholic than a forerunner of the

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[1]For an analysis of this literature see Helen C. White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century (New York: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 1-40.

Reformation. Skeat is prepared to admit the justice of many of these conclusions, but he himself insists that the poem's theology, and thus presumably its ecclesiology, is strongly influenced by Wycliffe's ideas: "Though not quite a Wycliffite, his sympathies were mostly with that party."[2]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Piers criticism turned its attention to other matters, principally to questions of authorship. Manly's "Lost Leaf Theory" and his resulting suggestions for multiple authorship of the poem called forth responses by Jusserand and Chambers which absorbed critical interest for some time.[3] Morton W. Bloomfield heralded a new direction in critical investigations in his famous article on the "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," saying:

> There is a vast field of study to which scholars are now turning, in the intellectual climate of the fourteenth century and its relation to the poem. It is here that the most productive work in the coming years can be done. A study of theology, European literatures, art, philosophy, and a fuller consideration of the social and economic facts will throw much light.[4]

Hand in hand with these areas of interest outlined by Bloomfield, scholarly criticism in the last three or four decades

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[2] Langland's Piers Plowman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), II, xlii.

[3] A convenient summary of these controversies is provided by Morton W. Bloomfield in his "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," Speculum, 14 (1939), 215-32.

[4] Bloomfield, "Present State of PP Studies," p. 228.

has also become much more interested in what the poem in itself has to say as a work of art. These two lines of interest have produced numerous helpful studies of the poem, many of which deal in one way or another with Langland's conceptions of the Church. Among these, Greta Hort's Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought[5] deserves mention, as do D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé's Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition,[6] and Bloomfield's own Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse.[7] Numerous articles on particular portions of the poem have been produced as well. G. R. Owst's Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England[8] also offers much helpful material in this area. R. W. Frank's Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation[9] may also be noted here, for while it may perhaps be a bit simplistic at times in its insistence on the "literal" level of the poem, it does provide a useful word of caution about getting too involved in over-elaborate allegorical interpretations of Langland's intention.

These and other studies have led to quite a change in the earlier "Protestant" view of Langland. Prevalent modern

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[5](Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969).

[6](Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

[7](New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

[8]2nd. rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961).

[9](New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957).

opinions tend to stress his Catholicity rather than his disagreement with the medieval Church and its view of life. Hort, for instance, refers to him as "a good medieval Christian,"[10] and A. H. Smith regards this fact as beyond dispute: "Everywhere, of course, he upholds a strict adherence to the doctrines of the Catholic Church and nowhere does he condone heresy."[11] It is certainly not my intention in this present study to set out with a determination to prove that these modern studies are wrong, and that Langland was actually a Protestant after all. It does seem, however, that a further study concentrating specifically on Langland's view of the nature and practice of the Church would prove a fruitful complement to the works which have already been produced. In the first place, even assuming that Langland desired to be a "faithful medieval Christian," scholars have come to realize that the faith of the "good medieval Christian" in Langland's period is very difficult to define. The works of such eminent expositors of medieval theology as David Knowles, Gordon Leff, and Brian Tierney show just how complicated was the theological spectrum in

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[10]Hort, p. 22.

[11]"Piers Plowman and the Pursuit of Poetry," in Robert J. Blanch, ed., Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman: A Modern Critical Anthology (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), p. 38.

fourteenth century England.[12] One or another of these areas of conflict, such as the controversy between the monks and friars, have, of course, been noted in numerous works on Piers Plowman. Specific studies, including doctoral dissertations, have been produced on the general influence of Wycliffe, Bishop Thomas Brinton, William of Ockham, etc., upon Langland.[13] None of these, however, has provided a specific and comprehensive examination of the nature of the Church as this applies to crucial questions of meaning and structure within the whole of Piers Plowman.

The question of the Church is crucial to an assessment of the movement and meaning of the poem, for as one reads through the successive passus of William's vision of Piers the Plowman, it becomes clear that the poem, whatever else it may be, is a search for authority, for a reliable guide through the complexities of human existence. By its own

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[12]Works of these scholars which proved particularly helpful for this dissertation include Knowles' The Evolution of Medieval Thought (London: Longman's, Green, 1962) and The Religious Orders in England, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948-59); Leff's Medieval Thought (London: Merlin Press, 1958); and Tierney's Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350, ed. Heiko Oberman, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, Vol. 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

[13]See Janet Coleman, "Sublimes et Litterati: The Audience for the Themes of Grace, Justification, and Predestination Traced from the Disputes of the Fourteenth Century Moderni to the Vernacular Piers Plowman," DAI, 32 (1971), 328A; M. A. Gallemore, "The Sermons of Bishop Thomas Brinton and the B Text of Piers Plowman," DA, 27 (1966), 3008A; W. P. Palmer, "The Intellectual Background of the Vision of Piers Plowman With Special Reference to the English and Latin Writings of John Wyclif (Vols. I and II)," DA, 20 (1959), 1769.

definition and understanding of itself, the medieval hierarchical Church, as God's appointed spokesman and agent of salvation, should be the one to provide this guidance, not only for the questing Will, but for all people in any time or place whatsoever. And yet, within Piers Plowman this all-embracing guidance is somehow lacking, somehow defective in its application to the Dreamer's need. Indeed, it is not going too far to say that this ecclesiological problem causes the poem to extend to so many lines, only to reach a conclusion which many readers consider unsatisfying, and which at the very least is not the "end" of the Dreamer's quest in any final sense. Throughout the poem there are not only countless passages where the poet details and condemns various abuses and abusors within the Church, but, as will be shown, there are several sections where the true nature of the Church itself seems in doubt (or at least a subject of no little confusion). In the world of Piers Plowman any such confusion presents a great problem indeed.

Langland several times presents the Church as the embodiment of the Divine ideal—but no sooner does he do so than he proceeds to deflate that ideal. He rejects and rebukes in the strongest terms the corruptions within the institutional Church, but at the same time evidences a great hesitation and reluctance to dispense with that institution, at least as an ideal. This results in a great tension within Piers Plowman, for at times Langland's position

seems in accord with those who asserted the Catholic Church's authority in all matters, secular and religious, while in other places his statements echo radical positions which reject the earthly Church in such strong terms as to come close to denying its heavenly nature entirely. This explains in part how different readers of the poem, depending upon their own point of view, have been able to claim Langland for both the Catholic and anti-Catholic parties.

For all this, a real tension remains within Piers Plowman on the subject of the Church, and this tension, whatever its theological importance, has a great effect upon the poem as a work of art and upon its essential meaning. Throughout the work the Dreamer seeks an answer to his initial question, "How may I save my soul?" He finds no simple answer to this question, however direct and concise the various alternatives he is given may appear. Had Langland been able to resolve this dilemma between the ideal and the failure of the institutional Church, his task would have been far easier and his work less tortuous. Granted that he wishes to be a dutiful son of Holy Church, he experiences a great difficulty in deciding just what is the nature of the true Church. Throughout the work, this tension remains, echoing and perhaps stemming from very similar tensions which permeated fourteenth century ecclesiology.

As this study seeks to deal with this problem in Piers Plowman, it will therefore prove helpful to explore the

various and conflicting views on ecclesiology which were current in Langland's day. This study is not a search for the "specific sources for Langland's statements on the Church." Still, a look at the ecclesiological positions which claimed men's attention in fourteenth century England (whether Langland may have become familiar with these positions from learned theological works themselves, summaries, polemical works, popular sermons, or convivial discussions) should help in delineating his own true concept of the Church, the streams of thought from which he was working, and the resulting place of the Church within the structure of Piers Plowman. It may indeed be seen that any confusion within Langland's work of art as to the nature of the Church reflects the general theological and philosophical atmosphere of the times.

Accordingly, the second (next) chapter of this study will provide a background study of the most traditional means by which man's salvation was to be accomplished, i.e., the Church. This will involve a brief discussion of the human condition as seen from a Christian perspective and the traditional role of the Church in the scheme of salvation, i.e., the Church in the order of creation. This will evolve into a specific discussion of the ecclesiology of the two great theologians Augustine and Thomas Aquinas whose combined works, albeit differing in perspective, did much to establish the position of the institutional and

hierarchical Church as the authoritative agent of salvation for medieval man. In addition to scholarly secondary sources, primary works will be utilized wherever possible.[14]

The third chapter will consider the ecclesiological situation of the fourteenth century specifically and will show that in spite of the secure understanding which the organizational Church had gained for itself, a series of circumstances and issues had developed which had combined to present the fourteenth century Church with a "crisis of authority" which called its very nature into question. William of Ockham, whose thought so undermined traditional understandings of the Church that he ushered in a new and less stable age of ecclesiology, will be considered first. The chapter will then focus on a series of disputes which resulted in the fourteenth century crisis of authority in the Church: prelatical abuses, division in the Church, the efficacy of the sacraments, free-will and predestination, and the concept of dominion. It will be seen that these topics, which may appear at first glance as a grab-bag of

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[14]References to the Fathers and Augustine will be from J. P. Migne, ed., Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca, 162 vols. (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1857-66) and Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, 221 vols. (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1844-64). These are referred to as Migne, PG and PL respectively. Citations from Aquinas are from Summa Theologiae, gen. eds. Thomas Gilby and T. C. O'Brien, 60 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1964), except for references to the "Supplement" to the Summa, which are from Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947-48).

theology in general, all had a very direct bearing on ecclesiology, for it was ultimately with questions of the nature and authority of the organizational Church that all these matters had to do. In discussing these issues, the positions of Ockham, Fitzralph, Brinton, Uthred of Boldon, Bradwardine, and Wycliffe will receive particular attention.

Before turning to a consideration of these matters in Piers Plowman itself, it seemed profitable to consider as well how ecclesiological problems are handled in some other works of imaginative literature of the period. Accordingly, Chapter IV turns its attention to Dante's Commedia, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, and Gower's Vox Clamantis for a brief, but hopefully instructive, exploration of how the themes, tensions, and concepts of ecclesiology are handled in these literary productions. The achievement, or lack of it, of these authors in coming to terms with the ideal and actuality of the Church affords a touchstone, a "scientific control" if you will, by which Langland may be evaluated from a literary viewpoint.

The remaining chapters (V to VIII) of the dissertation concentrate upon Piers Plowman itself, applying the results of these background investigations to a close reading of Langland's use of the Church within his poem. Here the approach is to concentrate upon specific passages throughout the poem where the question of Langland's ecclesiology is especially significant: The Teaching of Holy Church,

The Founding of Holy Church, The Castle of Unity, etc. Related passages and issues, e.g., Piers' Pardon, Clergy's Feast, and numerous examples of clerical abuse also receive attention in due course. The study does not keep to the strict order of these passages in the poem itself, preferring instead a more thematic approach, but like Langland himself, the investigation culminates in the final quest of Conscience for Piers, with all its attendant questions: Is Piers here the heavenly Christ or an earthly representative, salvation in heaven, or an ideal Church to be established on earth?

In the final analysis Langland's positions and possible confusions concerning the Church are seen to be symptomatic of like tensions in later fourteenth century theology as it concerned the Church. His thought is not so much reflective of one stream of this theology, but reflects all of the contemporary positions to a greater or lesser degree, a fact which gives to his work its unique character. Herein lies the source of many of the tensions and apparent confusions within the thought and structure of Piers Plowman, but herein too lies much of the abiding value of the work and its appeal to twentieth century man, who like Langland is often faced with a conflict of authorities and values as he searches for the meaning and goal of human life.

A word remains to be said concerning the version and texts of Piers Plowman employed in this study. In accord

with most recent scholarship, the study deals principally with the B Text, though both the A and C Texts are referred to from time to time. For the A and B Texts citations are given (unless otherwise noted) from the recent and authoritative editions by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson,[15] Skeat remains the basis for passages from the C Text.

I do not claim to have spoken the final word on all aspects of Langland's concept of the Church and its place within his poem. Neither do I claim that even if all possible questions of Langland's ecclesiology were answered, that an understanding of this area of his thought is the great solution to all the problems of interpretation in the work. Previous studies which have claimed to have found the one key to unlock all the secrets of the piece have proved inadequate to the task, and scholars should be warned by their example. Still, it remains true that Langland's ecclesiology plays a crucial role within the poem, and this study will hopefully play a part in elucidating the enigma which is Piers Plowman.

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[15] Piers Plowman: The A Version, ed. Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1960), and Piers Plowman: The B Version, eds. Kane and Donaldson (London: Athlone Press, 1975).

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUNDS IN ECCLESIOLOGY: THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Introduction

In Langland's poem Piers Plowman a most crucial question is posed mid-way through the first passus: "How may I save my soul?"[1] The rest of the poem records an agonizing search for an answer to this query with all its ramifications, and however one may read or interpret Piers Plowman this issue remains central to an understanding of the poem as a whole. This being the case, it seems appropriate, before considering the poem itself, to conduct a background study of the most traditional means by which that salvation was held to be accomplished, i.e., the Church.

Such a study, as a groundwork for dealing with Piers Plowman, will involve several issues. First, it must be established how the Church was seen in the order of creation, particularly as this relates to the human condition as seen from a Christian perspective. Also called for is a brief review of the dominant interpretations or re-interpretations of the nature and role of the Church, as well as the factors which generated these positions. In this

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[1]Passus I, 84.

chapter it will be seen that the major thrust of traditional ecclesiology was to give eternal security to men, and a sure answer to the question: "How may I save my soul?"

The Human Condition from a Christian Perspective

The central fact concerning the human condition as viewed from a Christian perspective is that man is a creature in need of salvation. On this point, at least, Christian writers of all schools and ages agree. Beginning with the archetypal story of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, resulting in their expulsion from Eden (Genesis 3:23-24),[2] the Judaeo-Christian tradition sees the life of natural or fallen man as one of toil, suffering, bondage to sin, and, most importantly, separation from God and deprivation of the immortal life for which man was created. In the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul presents a magnificent but terrifying picture of the cosmic significance of man's fall, concluding in Chapter 3:9 that all men share in the primeval curse: ". . . Causati enim sumus Judaeos et Graecos omnes sub peccato esse."[3] This is a sad fact which each person must recognize to be true of himself, as I John 3:8 insists:

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[2]Scriptural citations and quotations are from the Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem (Stuttgart: Würtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969).

[3]See also Galatians 3:22: "Sed conclusit Scriptura omnia sub peccato . . . ."

"Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimis, et veritas in nobis non est."

Building upon this scriptural foundation, the Fathers of the early Church concurred in this view of the human condition. There was, to be sure, no absolute consensus among the Fathers concerning the totality of man's depravity. Irenaeus, for example, at times seems to feel that there is a residual of good in all men which may be cultivated,[4] and Origen is prepared to admit that all men do at times perform good actions, though they do not attain to the perfection of good in their earthly existence.[5] Tertullian, on the other hand, is more inclined to take a completely negative view: "Imprimis, cum ad hoc venisse se dicit, uti quod periit, salvum faciat, quid dicas perisse? Hominem sine dubio. Totumne, an ex parte? Utique totum."[6] He then goes on to say that man, body and soul, is mortally "infected" by sin. However this may be, all the Fathers unite in seeing human kind as lost, and man in himself, even if a trace of good remains in him, as being incapable of attaining to the blessedness which he so badly needs.

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[4] Adversus Haereses, IV, xxxviii, 1-3, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), I, 521-22.

[5] Commentarium in Epistolam ad Romanos, iii, 3 (Migne, PG, 14:934).

[6] De Resurrectione Carnis, 34 (Migne, PL, 2:842).

As Origen concludes, man's will is not sufficient to attain the end of salvation.[7]

Later generations of Christians were to accept this view of man as a given fact. Augustine speaks of natural man as being "dead" both in soul and body,[8] and in his spirited works against Pelagius presents the depravity of man as an absolute, which man of himself cannot remedy.[9] Aquinas likewise sees natural-born man as under the power of the Devil and excluded from the life and salvation of God.[10] This, then, is the first and a most crucial part of the traditional Christian perspective on the human situation. Without it the question "How may I save my soul?" alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, could not have been asked, for the question presupposes that man is indeed in need of salvation. Some men might argue the point, but from a Christian perspective as developed from Scripture and the Fathers into medieval theology, man is indeed a lost creature in dire need of a restoration to spiritual wholeness and health (salus).

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[7] De Principiis, III, i, 18, trans. Henry Bettenson in The Early Christian Fathers (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 288.

[8] De Doctrina Christiana, I, 19 (Migne, PL, 34:25-26).

[9] For several of Augustine's anti-Pelagian treatises see Migne, PL, 44. See also William Bright, Select Anti-Pelagian Treatises of St. Augustine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1880).

[10] Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 49, art. 2: "Whether we were delivered from the Devil's Power through Christ's Passion?"

There is, however, another and more positive side to the Christian perspective on man. This is only to be expected, since there would be little point in telling man he is going to hell with no hope of reprieve. The consistent witness of the Scriptures, though, makes it abundantly clear that God wishes man to receive forgiveness and salvation. God is more than a stern judge of sin; he is also a loving Father, and in manifesting himself to humanity, God teaches men to address him as "Abba" (Romans 8:15), a term of endearment closely akin to the English "Daddy."[11] The salvation of men, of course, was the reason for the incarnation and sacrifice of the Eternal Son, accomplished by God for the benefit of lost mankind. Such a central point of the Christian message does not require extensive documentation, but a useful summary of the concept is provided in I Timothy 1:15: "Fidelis sermo, et omni acceptione dignus quod Christus Jesus venit in hunc mundum peccatores salvos facere . . . ." St. Athanasius, that pillar of orthodoxy, also gives moving expression to this central doctrine of the Christian faith:

> Our guilt was the cause of the descent of the Word, and our transgression called forth his loving-kindness, so that he came to us, and the Lord was displayed among men. For we were the occasion of his embodiment, and

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[11] A Theological Word Book of the Bible, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 78.

> for our salvation he went so far in his love for man as to be born and displayed in a human body.[12]

This emphasis on the mercy and love of God towards men provides the essential counterpoint to the Christian view of man as a lost creature, and is the core of the message and work of Christ, who in the words of the universal Nicene Creed ". . . propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis."

This being so, there remains no doubt from the Christian point of view that Christ has won once and for all the salvation which fallen man so desperately needs (see e.g., Hebrews 10:11-14). The question remains, however, how this salvation is to come to man. That is, how is the forgiveness won by Christ, and the salvation intended by Christ for man, to be applied to man in the succeeding ages? What are the channels by which the heavenly grace can come to man living in a sinful world?

The Role of the Church in the Scheme of Salvation

These questions lead immediately to a consideration of the Church, for in the traditional Christian understanding

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[12] De Incarnatione Verbi, 4, trans. Bettenson, The Early Christian Fathers, p. 378. Migne, PG, 25:103-04 gives the Greek text and a Latin translation. For a similar thought, also see Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 1, arts. 1, 2. See also Augustine, De Civitate Dei, VII, 31 (Migne, PL, 41:220-21.

this is the vehicle established by Christ to call men to salvation. This Church might be looked upon in several ways, mystical as well as empirical. It is referred to in the Scriptures as the "Body of Christ" (e.g., Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:15-16), and it is clear that the Church is on earth to continue the saving ministry of its "Head," Jesus Christ. This idea of ministry is continued in passages such as I Peter 2:9-10, where the Christian Church is seen as the successor and fulfillment of Israel, the people whom God had chosen to be his witnesses among the nations of the earth. In its earthly estate the Church was to declare salvation and bring grace to men, beginning with the Apostles, but continuing to the end of time. As St. Augustine says:

> . . . per Apostolos pervenit gratia ad alios, et missi sunt evangelizare. Quoniam qui vocavit primos, ipse vocavit secundos, ipse vocavit etiam usque ad novissimum tempus corpus Unigeniti sui, id est Ecclesiam toto orbe diffusam.[13]

The Church, however, was always more than a temporal institution, for after the first generation of Christians died, the Church came to be spoken of as three-fold: "Militant" and living on earth, but also "Triumphant" in heaven, and "Suffering" in the final purification of purgatory.[14] In

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[13]Sermon 239 (Migne, PL, 38:1127).

[14]See, e.g., Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 8; also Supplement Q 71, art. 9 and Appendices 1 & 2, Benziger ed., III, 2852-53, 3014-23.

the order of creation, then, while the Church might be looked upon as the physical means used by God to call men to salvation, a continuation of the ministry of Christ himself, it had also an eternal aspect, and in its three-fold fullness served as a bridge between the spiritual and the temporal realms. Such observations, of course, are of the most basic sort, and in the development of Christian thought these general ideas were to receive considerable refinement and amplification as the Church sought to define more fully its understanding of itself, its nature, and its mission to men of providing a sure answer to the question "How may I save my soul?"

Traditional Views of the Church: St. Augustine

In St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) Western Christendom found a profoundly spiritual writer whose voluminous works helped to shape the philosophy and theology of a milennium, gave a deeper understanding to the Church of its true nature, and bolstered the credibility and assurance of the Christian revelation for those who sought salvation. Coming as he did in the pivotal period of the collapse of ancient civilization and the beginning of the Middle Ages, Augustine was in a unique position to transmit the learning of the past to generations desperately seeking knowledge and authority, and to speak to those generations not as a classical writer, but as one of themselves. Add to this the

fact that Augustine was an intensely warm and personal writer who could touch the mystical as well as the intellectual fibers of man, and his appeal to succeeding theologians of many persuasions becomes incalculable. It is scarcely an exaggeration to call him the fount of medieval ecclesiology, for even those who differed with him were forced to take his teaching into account as they formulated their own positions.

In all of the theological formulations of Augustine, and particularly in his characterizations of the Church, two streams of thought coalesce. One is that of the idealistic Neo-Platonic system of philosophy which spoke with power to the men of his age, and which had greatly facilitated his own acceptance of the Church's claim to reveal the things of God to men.[15] The other was the concreteness of the Christian revelation, which saw the physical as well as the spiritual realm as the creation of God, and proclaimed a faith firmly rooted in history and the physical world.[16] The balance of these two factors enabled Augustine to place before men a view of reality and of the Church which looked beyond the phenomenal world to the "ultimate

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[15]Étienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine, trans. L. E. M. Linch (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 47-50.

[16]See Confessiones VIII, 12-13, 18-19 (Migne, PL, 32: 743-44, where all being, both physical and spiritual, is said to render praise to God. Evil is a negative, not simply a physical entity. See also Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 42.

Reality" of the Divine Ideal, while at the same time it did not lose contact with or invalidate the concrete world in which men in need of salvation must live. This for Augustine was a crucial point, for he was not interested in philosophy as a thing in itself. Apart from Divine authority, philosophical theories had no meaning, and philosophy was of value only as it aided men to know the things of God.[17] He was first and foremost a Christian theologian and bishop intent on leading his flock to the beatific vision of God. For this reason he did not concentrate on formulating a vast and orderly philosophical system, but proceeded immediately to dealing with the necessities of the life of faith, which alone could be said to participate in the realm of truth.[18] Of all these issues, that of the Church, within which context all the rest of faith and salvation was to operate, occupied a paramount place.

Concerning Augustine's view of the place of the Church and its crucial role in the life of man, a modern Catholic author offers the following general observation:

> God has not left man isolated in any sphere: in the physical and intellectual life He has given him the family and society; for the supernatural life He has also prepared a family and a society for man—the

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[17] De Civitate Dei, II, 7 (Migne, PL, 41:52-53).

[18] David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought, pp. 34, 37-39.

> Church, whose role, guaranteed by divine promises, is to give him life and to lead him to salvation.[19]

This statement, as anyone who has read far in the works of Augustine can testify, is certainly true as far as it goes. The matter is not quite so simple, however; for like theologians in all ages Augustine was faced with a tension between the ideal and visible realms, a tension which was particularly apparent in the case of the Christian Church. The Church could indeed be spoken of as the divinely appointed vehicle to bring man to the perfection of heaven, but as a visible institution it harbored within itself members who manifestly fell far short of a "Divine Ideal" in any sense of the word. Many laymen, and some even of the hierarchy, fell into this category. How could such a fallible and erring institution claim to be the divinely appointed earthly instrument for salvation of the perfect and transcendent God?

In striving to deal with this question St. Augustine found assistance in concepts derived from Neo-Platonism. The Church in its truest sense was conceived of as the "totality of the predestinate." This "totality" may be understood as consisting of all those who are to be saved

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[19]Eugene Portalié, A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine, trans. R. J. Bastian (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), p. 231.

from the beginning of time to the end of the world.[20] In this sense, the Church is the embodiment of an Ideal in the mind of God and transcends the limitations of time and place. Seen in this restricted sense, the true Church consists only of those members whom God has destined to attain the perfection of heaven.[21] Since the perfection of these members is already existent in the mind of God as a Divine Idea, it is therefore also already a reality.

Such a concept may solve the problem of the holiness of the Church in eternity, but the problem of the often imperfect visible institution currently existing on earth and bearing the name of Church still persists. Addressing this problem directly, St. Augustine departed from a strictly Neo-Platonic position, for as was noted above, he was keenly aware of the Christian position that God was the Lord of the physical and temporal as well as of the Spiritual and eternal realm. Accordingly, the Church was not simply a "spiritual concept," but properly had a visible manifestation, i.e., the "Church of the Predestinate" was

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[20]This is the ". . . numerus certus sanctorum praedestinatus ante mundi constitutionem" discussed in De Baptismo, V, 27, 38 (Migne, PL, 43:195-96). The In Johannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV, 26, 15 (Migne, PL, 35:1613-14) also speaks of the "Body" of the Church, which is ". . . Sancta Ecclesia in predestinatis et vocatis, et justificatis, et glorificatis sanctis, et fidelibus ejus." See also Enchiridion, 56 (Migne, PL, 40:258-59).

[21]See Scott M. Hendrix, Ecclesia in Via, ed. Heiko Oberman, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, Vol. 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 17-25.

to be reflected in an earthly institution. This institution was the visible Catholic Church, which contained the living members of the predestinate, even though it also contained "foreknown" members whose eternal lot was damnation. So it was that Augustine could refer to the visible Catholic Church as the "true yet mixed body."[22] As a part of the physical creation, the visible Church of necessity did not reflect the perfection of God's ideal, but its holiness was guaranteed by the presence within it of the Church of God's election. Although the visible and corporate Church was not strictly synonymous with the "Church of the Predestinate," it was the vehicle through which God called men into that eternal and perfect Church, and membership in the visible Catholic Church was a necessity for salvation. In speaking of the schismatic church of the Donatists, Augustine says that this false "church" may have all the rites and appearances of the true Church, but it is still not a vehicle for salvation.[23] He is willing to admit that God in his omnipotence could choose to save some who had no opportunity to become Christian without the visible Church and sacraments, but that those who scorn the Church and

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[22] De Doctrina Christiana, III, 32 (Migne, PL, 34:82), ". . . corpus verum atque permixtum."

[23] Sermo ad Caesareenis plebem, 6 (Migne, PL, 43:695). "Extra Ecclesiam catholicam totum potest praeter salutem."

sacraments can never attain salvation.[24] Jesus Christ was the only final Head of the true Church, but the pope was appointed by Christ to preside over the Catholic Church, which alone contained the elect of Christ, while the other apostolically ordained bishops and clergy were to assist in leading the faithful to salvation.[25] Those of the predestinate who were presently outside this visible Church would come into its fold before their life's end.[26] St. Augustine found in this actualization of the "Church of the Predestinate" through a visible, albeit imperfect, institution a comforting sense of order and a palpable assurance of salvation. He goes so far as to say that it is this succession of bishops, beginning from the Apostle Peter down to the present episcopate, which keeps him in the Church.[27]

For St. Augustine, salvation was only by the grace of God, but in accord with the positions outlined above, God

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[24] Quaestiones in Heptateucham, III, 84 (Migne, PL, 34: 713). After saying some like the Thief on the cross are saved without the visible sacraments, he says: "Nec tamen ideo Sacramentum visibile contemnendum est: nam contemptor eius invisibiliter sanctificari nullo modo potest."

[25] See, e.g., In Johannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV, 41, 10 (Migne, PL, 35:1697). De Haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum 53 (Migne, PL, 42:40), and Epistle 43, 3, 7 (Migne, PL, 33: 163).

[26] Barring the most exceptional dispensation of grace on behalf of those who had no opportunity of uniting with the Church. See n. 24 above. See also De Civitate Dei, I, 35 (Migne, PL, 41:46) where those of the elect who presently oppose the Church are called "cives futures" of it.

[27] Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti, 4, 5 (Migne, PL, 42:175). See Portalié, pp. 230-39.

had decreed that this grace should be imparted to men through the physical means of the sacraments. The traditional numbering of the sacraments as seven came after the time of Augustine, and while he gave primacy to those rites later denoted as sacraments, he also applied the term to any means by which the grace of God was conferred through phenomenal means.[28] In this wider sense, the Catholic Church itself might be called a sacrament, for within its temporal and physical existence the purely spiritual Church was contained and communicated to men. Such a thought is certainly not without echo in the writings of Augustine, for in two of his Easter sermons he specifically compared the Church to the eucharistic bread and wine which impart the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church, he says, is ground by penance, moistened with baptism, and "baked" by the fire of Chrism at confirmation to prepare men for heaven.[29]

Later, radical theologians were to make use of St. Augustine's concept of the "Church of the Predestinate" as a means of disputing the authority of the hierarchical Church, but Augustine himself saw the two as inextricably intertwined. It is true other Roman Catholic writers may have somewhat overstated their case in absolutely equating

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[28]See Sermon 227 (Migne, PL, 38:1099-1100) where exorcism is referred to as a sacrament.

[29]Sermons 227 and 229 (Migne, PL, 38:1099-1100, 1103).

the Church of the elect with the visible hierarchical corporation,[30] but it is nonetheless true that St. Augustine held that the "wheat and tares" must remain mingled within the Church until the day of judgment, and that the presence of wicked members in the Catholic Church does not deprive it of its relation to the Church as an Ideal in the mind of God.[31] For this reason, one must never forget that although St. Augustine divided humanity into two "cities," the City of God and the Worldly City, the elect and the reprobate, these are "mystical entities" which will be separated only at the end of time.[32] As Augustine himself says: "Perplexae quippe sunt istae duae civitates in hoc saeculo, invicemque permixtae donec ultimo judicio dirimantur . . . ."[33]

All this being said, there remains within the ecclesiology of St. Augustine a certain tension between the invisible Church of the Predestinate and the visible Church of the hierarchy and sacraments. This tension is no more fully resolved in his writings than it is in life itself. It is for this reason that in later ages both extreme pro-papalists

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[30]See, e.g., Stanislaus J. Grabowski, The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), pp. 209-25.

[31]Gilson, Philosophy of Augustine, p. 181.

[32]Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 45. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 167.

[33]De Civitate Dei, I, 35 (Migne, PL, 41:46).

and ecclesiastical rebels, each emphasizing a particular strand of his thought, were able to cite the Bishop of Hippo in their own support.[34] The Ideal Church remains as a constant challenge to the imperfections of the visible corporation, but in his stirring attacks on the Donatists, who insisted that the Church be perfect in this world, Augustine time and again removes himself from a rigidly perfectionist point of view.[35] All men sin and need the sacrament of penance,[36] and those who persist in sin are separated from the elect, though they may remain within the visible Church.[37] Sinful members are a scandal to the Church, particularly if they are clerics, but the unworthiness of some of its ministers does not deprive the Church's sacraments of their validity, for it is not the man, but Christ working through him who applies grace to souls.[38] It is also true that in Augustine's day he was still able to point

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[34]Walker, pp. 167-68.

[35]E.g., Ad Donatistas post collationem, 9, 12 (Migne, PL, 43:659). "Ecce manifestum est quod dicebatur a nobis, distinguenda esse tempora Ecclesiae: non eam esse talem, qualis post resurrectionem futura est: nunc malos habere permixtos tunc omnino non habere." See Portalié, p. 235, and Eugene Teselle, Augustine the Theologian (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 260.

[36]Sermon 210, VII (Migne, PL, 38:1063-64).

[37]In Johannis Evangelium tractatus CXXIV, 26, 13 (Migne, PL, 35:1613). ". . . non sit putre membrum quod resecari mereatur . . . ."

[38]Sermon 292 (Contra Donatistas), 6 (Migne, PL, 38: 1324).

to the general moral superiority of the Church as contrasted with the pagan society around it, an argument which he develops in considerable detail in the opening books of De Civitate Dei as a further buttress for the Church's claim to be the trustworthy representative of God.[39] For Augustine, in spite of occasional and lamentable deviations from the perfect Ideal, the visible Catholic Church remains as God's appointed witness and guide for souls on earth seeking the salvation of heaven.

The contribution of St. Augustine to ecclesiology was almost incalculable. He succeeded in taking traditional Christian teaching on the Church and expressing it in terms basically consistent with the prevalent Neo-Platonic philosophy of his day, providing a view of the Church which was at once spiritually satisfying and intellectually stimulating. The Church was affirmed as Divine Ideal and phenomenal reality, bridging the gulf between this world and the next. In spite of the fact that he was more a topical and polemical rather than a systematic theologian, the Church of succeeding centuries continued to see itself in accord with his basic point of view, and "for a thousand years after his death all theologians and spiritual writers turned to him as to a court from which there was no appeal. . . ."[40] Few

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[39]See esp. Book II, ch. 16 (Migne, PL, 41:60-61).

[40]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 33.

writers in any age have done as much to provide a certain answer to the question "How may I save my soul?"

Traditional Views of the Church: Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) has been hailed by many as a theological innovator, as one who "turned the Augustinian world upside down."[41] There is indeed some truth in this assertion, for while Augustine and his successors worked from a Neo-Platonic basis which worked from the Ideal or universal to its reflection in the phenomenal and individual world, Aquinas introduced into theology an Aristolelian approach which began with the phenomenal and worked to the universal. In so doing he made certain that Christian theology, and particularly ecclesiology, remained firmly rooted in the visible world instead of getting lost in an endless discussion of nebulous "Ideals" which practically ignored physical reality, as some Augustinian thinkers might be tempted to do.[42] It is, however, a manifest mistake to see the Thomistic system as a total break or revolution in the traditional view of the Church which stemmed from St. Augustine.

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[41]Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 214.

[42]Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 6. We should note with Gilson (Philosophy of Augustine, p. 238), however, that such a development was certainly not the intention of Augustine himself.

In the first place, Aquinas was a Moderate Realist, which meant that while he would be inclined to give more place than a pure Idealist to the validity of empirical knowledge, he was far from denying the existence of universals entirely. In physical matters Aquinas is quite comfortable with Aristotle, but as his thought approaches God, the ultimate source of Being, he veers much more towards Platonism.[43] In a manner quite in harmony with the thought of Augustine himself, Aquinas sees God alone as pure Being, with all creatures being the result of the archetypes existing in the Divine Mind which God wills to come into concrete existence.[44] Although some theologians totally dedicated to Neo-Platonic perspectives viewed the whole work of Aquinas as a betrayal of traditional understanding, so much so in fact that Archbishop Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) and his successor John Peckam tried to keep all influences of Thomism out of England, Aquinas ultimately made no cataclysmic break with past orthodoxy, but rather steered a median course between the extremes of Aristotelianism and Platonism.

This was very important for the Church and its self-confidence in the thirteenth century on at least two accounts. First, the remarkable adaptability of the

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[43]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 265.

[44]See Summa Theologiae, I, I, qu. 3, art. 4; qu. 11, arts. 3-4; qu. 44, art. 3, esp. the latter.

Christian tradition was once again affirmed. As Augustine had succeeded in defining the Church and its faith in terms of the current Neo-Platonism, so now Aquinas had accomplished a similar feat in response to the Aristotelian emphases which were filtering into the Western Church, chiefly from Arabic sources.[45] Secondly, and just as importantly, he had accomplished this more by building upon and modifying, rather than by directly challenging, the great authority of St. Augustine. Aquinas himself made frequent use of Augustine's positions, and the Church as reflected in Thomistic thought was essentially the same institution as that of Augustine.[46]

Aquinas' innovations in Christian philosophy, however, have great importance for his ecclesiological formulations. He is always concerned first and foremost with being and reality as it is manifested in the phenomenal world.[47] This does not mean that he is not concerned with the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. This was an important concept for him, as was the Ideal for the Church in the mind and the will of God. At the same time, he is less interested than the typical Augustinian in devoting attention to

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[45] R. J. Henle, Saint Thomas and Platonism (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), p. xiv. See also Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 45.

[46] Summa Theologiae, passim. See also, e.g., Henle, pp. 394-95.

[47] Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 215-16.

such abstractions as the "Totality of the Predestinate," existing in an archetypal sense. Rather, he is more concerned with the way in which the eternal Church is given form and substance in the institutions and individuals of the phenomenal world.

For St. Thomas, the Church truly exists in heaven, purgatory, and earth. The Church is one, and the various parts of the Church aid one another by prayer and the merit of good works magnified by grace.[48] In treating the Church on earth, however, he is even more careful than Augustine to leave no room for doubt that the visible and hierarchical institution of the Catholic Church is the only true Church. Just as in Thomistic philosophy the soul does not have a separate and spiritual existence of its own (as it does with the Augustinians), but exists in an essential relation to the body of man as its "form,"[49] so the Church as "Ideal" does not exist independently or apart from its manifestation in the visible institution. This visible "Body of Christ"

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[48]See, e.g., the Supplement to the Summa Theologica, qu. 71, arts. 6-8, in Summa Theologica, Benziger edition, III, 2850-51. Aquinas did not live to complete this portion of his work, but it was continued by his friend Fra Rainaldo da Piperno, using other works of Aquinas as a basis, esp. his Commentary on the Fourth Book of Lombard.

[49]Summa Theologiae, I, I, qu. 75, art. 5: "Decendum quod anima non habet materiam. Et hoc potest considerari dupliciter. Primo quidem, ex ratione anime in commune. Est enim de ratione animae quod sit forma alicujus corporis."

requires a visible head, which is provided by the pope.[50] In a similar manner, this intimate union of the spiritual and the material, the Ideal and the phenomenal, is again emphasized by Aquinas' great respect for the sacraments of the Church, where the grace of God is conferred through a visible or material means as the normal procedure whereby God deals with man for salvation.[51] As Walker says in explaining Aquinas' concept of grace:

> Grace does not come to man indiscriminately. It has its definite channels and these are the sacraments and the sacraments alone. . . . Without them there is no true union with Christ.[52]

The Eucharist, as defined by Transubstantiation, continues the indwelling of the material by the spiritual, and in upholding the necessity for auricular confession Aquinas again insists that the invisible forgiveness of Christ must normally be conferred through a visible agent (the priest).[53]

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[50] Summa Theologiae, II, II, qu. 1, art. 10; II, II, qu. 88, art. 12 reply obj. 3. See also the Supplement, qu. 40, art. 6 where the primacy of the pope is formally treated.

[51] Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 61, art. 1: "Utrum sacramenta sint necessaria ad salutem humanam." Aquinas argues that this is so owing to the corporal nature of man and God's desire that man should "per corporalia et sensibilia in spiritualia et intelligibilia deducatur."

[52] Walker, p. 247.

[53] For Aquinas' teaching on the Eucharist see Summa Theologiae, III, qq. 73-83, with Transubstantiation particularly being treated in qq. 75-77. Penance is discussed in Summa Theologiae, III, qq. 84-90, and its necessity is stressed in qu. 84, art. 5.

Once again the role of the visible Church as unique dispenser of salvation is affirmed.

In his treatment of the sacraments Aquinas gave philosophical confirmation and precision to existing practices of the Church and to the popular opinions of its members. As was noted previously, St. Augustine had been inclined to call any means of grace a sacrament. In the course of time, though, certain major rites had come to be considered more "sacramental" than others. In the latter twelfth century Peter Lombard had formally listed the sacraments as seven, and his opinion, aided by the popularity of his Book of the Sentences, had gradually gained common acceptance.[54] Aquinas accepted this teaching,[55] but went into great detail as to why certain rites were sacraments and others were not. He also further specified the precise effect of each sacrament and its relation to the others in an exceptionally clear and logical way. Other rites which had sometimes been termed sacraments were systematized as "sacramentals."[56] Another example of Aquinas' philosophical and theological justification of popular Catholic piety may be found in his defense of the laity's receiving the bread alone in the Eucharist. This practice had been begun by laymen in

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[54]Walker, p. 247.

[55]Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 65, art. 1.

[56]Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 71, art. 3, reply obj. 2.

England because they feared the spilling of the consecrated "Blood." Some had objected that in receiving only the bread, the laity were receiving only half the sacrament. Nonetheless, the custom had spread, and Aquinas assured the Church of its propriety by showing that both the Body and the Blood of Christ were contained in each element of the sacrament.[57] By such means Aquinas labored not to shake, but to buttress the common faith of the Church. This has a definite ecclesiological importance, for it not only "proved" that what the Church was doing was right, but also gave the fullest possible expression to traditional theology on an intellectually sound basis. The view of the Church as God's chosen spokesman and saving agent was thus considerably enhanced.

This systematization of the Church's teaching and understanding of itself is perhaps Aquinas' greatest accomplishment. Aquinas was well aware that there were divergencies in the teaching of the Fathers, popes, and Councils, not to mention the challenges of various heresies, which might cast doubt upon the claim of the visible Church to authority in salvation. In the works of Aquinas the great theological controversies of the past are relived in the "objections, replies, and sed contras" which he offers in discussions of received Catholic doctrines. For all this,

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[57] Summa Theologiae, III, qu. 76, art. 2. Walker, p. 248.

he always ends by concluding exactly as the received councils and Fathers of the Church had done.[58] In cases where the Fathers themselves seem to disagree, he cautions that before a specific problem has been decided by the Church,

> . . . authors tend to speak with less circumspection . . . therefore authoritative statements of the Fathers must be seen in their historical context, and their "meaning" (the intentio auctoris) must be carefully understood.[59]

He produced his masterful gloss on the Gospels, the Catena aurea, specifically to show the real harmony of the Church's Fathers, and thus to prevent contemporary believers from being misled by seeming discrepancies.

In all that he does, Aquinas strives to support, not discredit the hierarchy and the congregatio fidelium of the visible Church as the spokesman for Christ and the guide of the individual on the way to salvation. Seen in its proper light, his use of Aristotelian principles was not so much a revolt against earlier views as it was an even more complete welding of the spiritual and material realms, with the consequent strengthening of the visible Church which Augustine himself had sought. The Church as it emerges in the thought of Aquinas is an institution in which all things have their

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[58] James A. Weisheipl, Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 168.

[59] Weisheipl, pp. 169-70. We may note a similar intention of Gratian (fl. 1225) on behalf of Canon Law in his Concordantia discordantium canonum.

place, all questions have answers, and all things, even the sins of the faithful, are fully provided for. Never, perhaps, has the question "How may I save my soul?" received so complete and definite an answer. Small wonder that after the cataclysm of the Reformation, the Catholic Church returned to Aquinas as to a rock upon which to build its authority and self-understanding.

Conclusion: The Church as Authority

The above pages have traced, at least briefly, a progressive depth and assurance in the Christian Church's answer to the question "How may I save my soul?" Beginning with the most basic Christian positions that man is a creature in need of salvation and that Christ offers the saving remedy to man, the seeker of salvation is forced to turn at once to questions of ecclesiology, for it has also been a basic Christian claim from the beginning that it is through the Church that the salvation won by Christ is applied to man. In meditating upon these basic facts as it entered the Middle Ages, the Church was fortunate to find in St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas theologians who could explicate with power and depth the Church's understanding of itself. Despite certain differences of perspective, the result of both men's work was a bolstering of the corporate Church's confidence in itself and its credibility to men.

It was on this solid foundation that "the Age of Faith" could be built, and that Pope Boniface VIII could assert in 1302:

> Unam sanctam ecclesiam catholicam et ipsam apostolicam urgente fide credere cogimur et tenere, nosque hanc firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur, extra quam nec salus est, nec remissio peccatorum. . . . Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus esse de necessitate salutis.[60]

From the viewpoint of the above encyclical, all of human society was seen as one, with the Catholic Church as the proper homeland (patria) of all, transcending the boundaries and loyalties of nation and region. This did not mean that the Church was seen as existing in distinction or opposition to secular governments, but that it included them and in many cases exercised its sovereignty through these dependent authorities. In such a view, God had established the hierarchical Church as a secure guide for all men in all things, and the pope as head of the Church had a duty to watch over and supervise all aspects of civil and private life, spiritual and temporal alike.[61] The Church, in theory at least, could go no farther in providing a clear definition of itself, and an answer of assurance for all who sought salvation.

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[60] "Unam Sanctam," in A. Friedberg, ed., Corpus Iuris Canonici (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1879), II, 1245-46.

[61] Walter Ullmann, The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages, 2nd. ed. (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 445-51.

CHAPTER III

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY CRISIS IN ECCLESIOLOGY AND AUTHORITY

Introduction

As a result of the work of Augustine, Aquinas, and men of similar intent, the matter of ecclesiology, with its attendant theological and practical issues, might be thought to have received a final answer. Questions which relate to human beings, however, seldom work out so simply as might be expected.[1] The fourteenth century evidences not a continuation of the "synthesis" which had characterized the century before, but rather a progressive uncertainty in positions on the Church and salvation which can only be described as a general "crisis in authority." Because of this, finding an answer to the question "How may I save my soul?" was to become decidedly more difficult for fourteenth century man than it was for his fathers before him.

In seeking to gain some understanding of the dimensions and causes of this crisis, several issues, often

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[1]In this light, one may note that the Bull Unam Sanctam was issued by Boniface VIII in response to a serious threat to his authority from King Philip the Fair of France, and that if it was seriously intended to bring about the capitulation of this sovereign, it conspicuously failed of its object. See Ullmann, p. 456.

interrelated, require attention. Mention must be made of the increasing independence of secular authorities and their unwillingness to adhere to the all-embracing role which the Church saw for itself. Of an ultimately more serious nature, however, is the intellectual challenge posed to the Church and its authority by William of Ockham and his followers, a challenge which undercut the very basis of reliability and permanence on which the Church had grounded its self-understanding. As such, Ockham may stand as a sort of symbol of the more general crisis which was to confront the Church as the fourteenth century progressed. The reader must realize too that the fourteenth century ecclesiological crisis did not often result in an explicit debate concerning the nature of the Church itself, but was chiefly precipitated by narrower disputes which turned on or called into question traditional views of the Church. These issues included prelatical abuses, divisions within the Church, the efficacy of the Sacraments, free-will and predestination, and the concept of Dominion. At first glance these disputes may seem to be a grab-bag of theological issues in general. Underlying them all, however, is the question of the Church, its nature, and its role in salvation. As the theologians of the period, or poets such as Langland, wrestled with such specific issues, it is ultimately an ecclesiological question of authority and the attendant question of salvation that they are posing.

Ockham and the Shaking of the Foundations

The life and works of William of Ockham (1300-1349) mark a watershed in the development of Medieval Thought. Whether as the originator of novel ideas, or an the inevitable culmination of unresolved tensions and conflicts among those who went before him, Ockham put forth positions which challenged the philosophy and the ecclesiology of the scholastic Augustinians and Thomists of the thirteenth century. As such, he and his followers stand as representatives of the eclectic and contentious fourteenth century, a period which optimists might hail as a time of fresh beginnings, but which others might lament as the passing of ideological and institutional stability.

Fourteenth century scholars had a penchant for pushing their arguments to their extreme logical conclusions, no matter what the consequences. Ockham was no exception, and while many of his positions were derived from Duns Scotus, he carried them far beyond Scotus' original intent.[2] More specifically, he extended Scotus' emphasis on the individual as opposed to the "Universal," ultimately denying any existence to universals at all except as "concepts" in the human mind which expressed a perceived likeness among several existing individuals. As he says: "[Universalis est] nullo

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[2]For a convenient summary of Scotus' thought, see Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 262-72.

modo ex natura rei sed secundum rationem tantum vel per considerationem intellectus."[3] For ecclesiology specifically, this has disquieting implications, for it means that all the Neo-Platonic expressions of St. Augustine concerning the archetypal "Church of the Predestinate," etc., become meaningless. Likewise, vast segments of Aquinas' moderate-realist system vanish into oblivion. If these premises of Ockham were accepted, a large portion of the terms by which the Church had understood itself would have to be completely rethought.

Still, the Church had survived a conflict over "Universals" in the eleventh century with little lasting effect, and perhaps could have done so again. Ockham, however, did not stop here, but went on to evolve positions which might be used to destroy the union of faith and reason which had formed the basis of churchly definitions from the beginning, and had provided the entire working hypothesis of Medieval Scholasticism.[4] For Ockham, reason deals not with "intuitive knowledge" (intuitive) of things in themselves, but with "abstractive knowledge" (abstractive) which deals with

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[3]Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum Ordinato, I, 2, 7, in Guillelmi De Ockham: Opera Philosophica et Theologica ad Fidem Codicum Manuscriptorum Edita, ed. P. J. Lalor (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1967-74), I, pt. 2, 226. Ockham's commentary on Lombard is hereafter cited as Ordinato, and references to the Franciscan edition of his works are given in parentheses following the main citation.

[4]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, pp. 323-26.

concepts which are only contingent (contingens), and may or may not ultimately have a basis in reality.[5] Ockham also insisted that one must avoid positing relationships between concepts which cannot be demonstrated clearly from the nature of the concepts themselves: ". . . nulla notitia incomplexa unius rei potest esse causa sufficiens notitiae alterius rei."[6] This results in the conclusion that the truths of faith cannot be approached "from below" as it were. In essence, this meant that faith lay outside the bounds of human reason.

The threat of such a position to the claim of the Church to be the authoritative spokesman of God can best be seen in Ockham's speculations concerning the traditional distinction of God's power (potentia) as ordained (ordinata) and absolute (absoluta).[7] In theory, God's power had always been acknowledged as unlimited (except perhaps by self-contradiction). In practice, however, former theologians had not been so concerned with this potentia absoluta, but had concentrated on the potentia ordinata, the way in which

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[5]Ordinato, I, 2, 9 (I, pt. 2, 313-14). See also Ordinato, Prologue, 9 (I, pt. 1, 240-44). For a helpful discussion of the distinction between intuitive and abstractive knowledge, see Philotheus Boehner, "The Notitia Intuitiva of Non-existents According to William of Ockham," in Collected Articles on Ockham, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1958), pp. 270-71.

[6]Ordinato, I, 2, 9 (I, pt. 2, 314).

[7]Ockham deals with this distinction in Quodlibeta VI, q. 1, and in Summa logicae, III, 4, 6 (II, pt. 1, 771-86).

God's power was applied to creation in revealed and consistent ways. Yet Ockham now insisted that since the potentia absoluta existed and could always overrule the potentia ordinata if God chose, logically speaking one cannot discuss the truths of revelation and the relationships between them as if they were certainties, for God might at any moment choose to do otherwise than as men had been led to believe. In the final analysis, God's omnipotent will remained the only "right," the only "truth," and such provisions for salvation in the potentia ordinata as grace, faith, the sacraments, even the Church itself, might be dispensed with if God should choose. Scotus had approached such conclusions, but Ockham utilized them in a far more consistent and radical way. His formulation of the potentia absoluta had the result of reducing God to an unpredictable quantity, and as Leff observes: "It gave the final stamp to his outlook in putting theology beyond the realm of reason."[8] One may also observe that if God is an unpredictable quantity, then anything the Church has to say about him is open to question, and the Church's claim to authority in salvation is ultimately destroyed.

Ockham certainly did not set out to destroy the Catholic Church and religion, but his conclusions if accepted and applied would surely destroy the vision of wholeness

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[8]Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 286-91.

and order in this world and the next which had provided one of the Church's most valuable and attractive attributes in the hands of Augustinians and Thomists alike. Ockham himself was careful to insist that he was not denying the truths of the faith, but only questioning the ability of reason to demonstrate and deal with them. Christianity must be accepted on "authority," and Ockham proclaimed that he did indeed accept it. It is with true conviction that after presenting a series of plausible but radical arguments on a subject he can say "The Faith is in opposition [to all these arguments]."[9] At the same time, one cannot deny that his positions did in fact imply that the traditional approaches of the Church to theology were mistaken. Furthermore, even granting that theological truths must be accepted on "authority," Ockham still could not provide a satisfactory answer to the question "Where does this authority reside?"[10] One might assume that Ockham's positions would actually strengthen the position of the organizational Church, since it could declare itself to be God's appointed "authority" to declare what was to be believed and done to gain salvation, reasonable or not. In his writings Ockham had pointed to the Church in this regard, and such assertions

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[9]M. M. Adams and Norman Kietzmann, trans., William of Ockham: Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 55.

[10]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 323; Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 291.

were actually made within an Ockhamist framework, e.g., at the Council of Constance (1415). Such a direct incarnation of God's authority, however, works far better in an Augustinian or Thomist system than it does in Ockham's, which had already shattered many of the links between this world and the one beyond. The fourteenth century seeker of salvation might well feel that he was floundering in the sea of Ockham's conceptualist logic. This is the more likely since in spite of all his early statements on adherence to Church authority, Ockham in his later years was moved to deny that the decrees of the visible hierarchy corresponded to those of Christ, and finished by supporting a doctrine of papal infallibility with the paradoxical intent of proving the reigning pope to be a heretic.[11]

The very real threat of Ockhamism to the traditional Church can be seen in his radical followers who pushed scepticism beyond the limits of Ockham himself.[12] An

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[11]The dispute which brought about this development will be treated in detail in a later portion of this chapter.

[12]Professor Gordon Leff in his latest work on Ockham, William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), is careful to underscore the difference between the intention of Ockham and the application of his principles by certain of his followers. For a survey of several of these radical Ockhamists see Gordon Leff, Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c. 1215-c. 1450 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), II, 295; Leff, Medieval Thought, pp. 291-92; Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 329. For an illuminating view of Robert Holcott in particular, see Beryl Smalley, English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), pp. 133-202.

extreme example is provided by Ockham's associate Adam of Woodham, who was so fascinated by the potentia absoluta that he asserts that God can go against his own knowledge and revelation. In his Commentary on the Sentences, III, 5, Woodham can even state: "It can be said that He could lie and He could sin."[13] It hardly needs to be said that such positions effectively destroy the Church as the divinely appointed agent of revelation and salvation. After all, what was revelation and what was salvation, for what indeed, is truth and what is sin?

In spite of its disquieting potential, the thought of Ockham had a great influence upon the works of fourteenth century theologians. As one authority on Ockham observes:

> Pendant deux siècles, les doctrines dont il passait pour l'initiateur ont agité les écoles, sans que les interventions répétées des autorités religieuses ou les règlements académiques aient pu en arrêter le succès.[14]

It would be going too far, however, to say that he was the cause of all the disputes which precipitated the fourteenth century ecclesiological crisis of authority. Rather, he stands as a symbol of the new age into which ecclesiological matters were to enter, an age of doubt, scepticism, and

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[13]Quoted in translation in Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 293.

[14]Robert Guelluy, Philosophie et Théologie chez Guillaume d'Ockham (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947), pp. 13-14. See also Knowles, Religious Orders, III, 82; Leff, Heresy in the Later Middle Ages, II, 300.

division. Gone was the sureness of outlook which made Aquinas' Summa possible, and in its place was an uncertainty and incompleteness which led one recent scholar of Ockhamism to conclude almost in desperation:

> Ockham never wrote any really systematic treatise on the nature and structure of the church . . . . None of these works provides a coherent exposition of Ockham's own views on the central problems of ecclesiology.[15]

This failure might be said to be symptomatic of the state of the Church in the fourteenth century. In any case, the stage was set for a series of perplexing and convoluted disputes which called into question the institutional Church's place in the scheme of salvation in all aspects of its life, just as the thought of Ockham had challenged the Church's most basic traditional intellectual foundations. The sum of these questions was to result in the fourteenth century ecclesiological crisis of authority, a crisis with grave implications for any who would ask "How may I save my soul?"

Prelatical Abuses: Spirituality and Worldly Gain

Ironically, the very success of the medieval Church in incorporating all of Western society within its bounds led to tensions and at times abuses which were to pose a fundamental threat to its claims to spiritual authority. The

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[15]Tierney, Origins, p. 206.

Church had lived through the cataclysmic collapse of classical civilization and had played a crucial role in refashioning Western Europe into the society of the Middle Ages. In doing so, the Church had become a financial and political power in its own right, while clerics provided as well a major portion of the educated officials which allowed the secular powers to function. This massive involvement in "worldly affairs," however, had raised the question of whether the Church had become so involved in temporal matters and possessions that it had in fact become a worldly rather than a spiritual power. In the fourteenth century this question was to become a starting point for severe attacks on the institution which claimed to represent Christ to the world.

W. A. Pantin in his The English Church in the Fourteenth Century[16] claims that the fourteenth century Church was really no worse in this respect than the Church of the centuries before. This, however, is not really the point here. The fact remains that the "cure of souls" suffered because of problems such as ecclesiastical wealth, pluralism, absenteeism, clerics in secular office, and appropriation of tithes, and that resentment against these abuses led to criticism and open revolt against the institutional Church. Pantin himself in reviewing the statistics of the

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[16](Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 41.

Diocese of London for 1366 finds that there were 169 cases of pluralism (i.e., one person holding multiple benefices), with nine individuals holding one-third of the total value of these benefices. He also notes that about one-fifth of the pluralists were civil servants exercising a minimum of clerical duties, but enjoying approximately one-half of the total revenues of all these benefices.[17] In England particularly, many benefices were held by men who had never set foot on English soil as a result of the "working arrangement" reached by the pope and king whereby the pope would confirm the king's choices for bishoprics if the king would not interfere with the pope's appointment of curial officials and other protegées to certain lower, though financially lucrative, positions among the English clergy.[18] Also many of the men chosen for bishoprics were primarily administrators who had risen in the king's service, and many, in fact, though they had previously held minor clerical orders, were ordained priests only after their election, and just in time for their consecration.[19] This is more

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[17]Pantin, pp. 36-37. The statistics from which these conclusions are reached are recorded in the Registrum Simonis de Sudberia, ed. R. C. Fowler and C. Jenkins (Canterbury and York Society, 1938), II, xxxvii-xliii. The Diocese of Lincoln reported a similar situation in the same year (see Pantin, p. 37).

[18]George M. Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (London: Longman's, Green, 1912), p. 107.

[19]Margaret Deanesly, A History of the Mediaeval Church (London: Methuen and Co., 1959), p. 193.

than enough to give cause for questioning the true extent of the spiritual interests of many in positions of leadership in the institutional Church.

In fairness to Pantin it should be noted that wealthy pluralists such as those cited above were not the rule, and that most pluralists held only two or three small benefices in an effort to get enough money on which to live.[20] This, however, raises another problem, that of appropriation. Appropriation simply means that all or a fixed portion of the tithes and other revenues of a parish were "appropriated" for the use of another institution, e.g., a college or monastery. Over the years many of these institutions had become quite wealthy as more and more benefices had been appropriated for their use. The beneficiary of such appropriations was responsible for hiring a priest to care for the people of the parish, but in many cases the salary offered was so small that pluralism became a necessity. In some cases a small appropriated parish would simply stand vacant for years, though the tithes would continue to be paid to the monastery or other beneficiary.[21] The extent of this problem may be gauged by realizing that in the fourteenth century nearly half of the parishes in the Dioceses

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[20]Pantin, pp. 37-38.

[21]Trevelyan, p. 122.

of York and Lincoln were appropriated.[22] A variant on the system of appropriation was the accepted custom of giving a cleric permission to be absent from his parish for long periods of time in order to study at a university, the cost being borne by the parish revenues.[23] In such a situation the student and the already wealthy educational institution benefited, but the parish itself could be left with little or no spiritual care.

At the root of all these problems lay the basic assumption that Church revenues were a guaranteed source of income for clerics, no matter what their true function might be. It is preposterous to assume that all fourteenth century clerics were wealthy money-grubbers, but it is also true that in more than a few cases men with little or no spiritual interest were led into a nominal church career by the thought of financial security, and that many Church institutions were very wealthy indeed. In spite of all the "good" priests, abusers in this area could well become the focus for challenges to the Church which tolerated them within its clergy.

The danger of such a situation had not been ignored by certain leaders in the English Church. Archbishop Fitzralph,

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[22]A. H. Thompson, The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 115.

[23]Pantin, p. 39.

for example, had insisted that men ordained to the priesthood should possess suitable spiritual and educational qualifications for a clerical calling, and Grosseteste had involved himself in serious conflict with influential monks because he had refused to ordain one of their protegées. Grosseteste remarked that the man was clad in scarlet, had numerous rings upon his fingers, and, in short, made quite a dashing and gallant appearance. Unfortunately, as the bishop found upon questioning the gentleman, he was "almost totally without knowledge," and was thus firmly rejected as a candidate for ordination.[24]

Practices such as those outlined above continued, however, and were denounced in no uncertain terms by Bishop Thomas Brinton (fl. 1370), whose personal life offers a striking contrast to that of the wealthy and politically motivated Churchmen who held many medieval benefices. Though his see of Rochester was not only the smallest, but also the poorest, diocese in England, he evidences no aspiration to climb to a more lucrative office, and appears to have been quite content with the cure of the souls entrusted to his care.[25] Indeed, judging on the basis of his net worth as reported in his will, compared to the other bishops

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[24]Gotthard Lechler, John Wiclif and his English Precursors, trans. Peter Lorimer (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1878), I, 80, 117-18.

[25]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 59; Pantin, p. 183.

of his day he was practically a pauper.[26] It is apparent from this that his denunciations of excessive ecclesiastical wealth and worldly ambition were more than mere words.

Brinton was well known as a preacher, and it was he who delivered the coronation sermon for Richard II in 1377.[27] In his sermons Brinton heaped scorn upon clerics who were too ignorant or too lazy to feed their flocks with the Word of God. He likewise assails the moral incapacity of many Churchmen, and one of his favorite statements is that the care of a thousand souls is often entrusted to men who are not worthy to look after a thousand apples or pears.[28] His ire is also kindled by "false shepherds" who leave their flocks for lucrative benefices elsewhere, especially for the service of the courts and chancery. Brinton does not hesitate to apply the same criticism to the highest Church officials, and laments the fact that gold alone has a voice in the processes of the papal curia.[29]

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[26]Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin, ed., The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373-1389), Camden Society, 3rd. series (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1954), I, xvi. Hereafter referred to as Brinton, Sermons. The text of the will is found in Brinton, Sermons, II, 503-04.

[27]For a literary analysis of Brinton's homiletics see Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp. 15 ff., and Literature and Pulpit, pp. 291-92. Also see Pantin, p. 183.

[28]Brinton, Sermons, I, xxi, 370, 417.

[29]Brinton, Sermons, I, xxi-xxii, 417.

From the tenor of Brinton's remarks on the corruption of both the higher and lower clergy, one might assume that he had a close affinity with radical opponents of the Church. Brinton, however, in all that he said or did was trying to promote order and stability in Church and society. His ideal for human life had the visible and hierarchical Church at the head of society as the guide of humanity in all areas: spiritual, moral, and political.[30] Ideally, the bishops and other clergy should be men of absolute devotion and integrity, and the rest of mankind should give them honor as the spokesmen of Christ Himself. Yet, he is forced to admit that the clergy of his day failed to live up to this ideal, and more often reflected the values of a corrupt world than those of Christ. Brinton opposed the Lollards' radical view of the Church,[31] but he saw that the very obvious concern of many churchmen with secular wealth and position, coupled with moral laxity, was providing a believable basis for much of the opposition to the Church's authority which was besetting it in the mid-fourteenth century. Brinton himself maintains that the Church is essentially sound and that the effort to purge the Church of extraneous and harmful excesses must come from within. This reform must be made, however, or the position of the Church would become precarious indeed.

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[30]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 59.

[31]See Pantin, p. 184; Brinton, Sermons, I, xxxi, 462.

Brinton was correct in his assessment of the risk into which a wealthy and worldly Church was placing its authority and credibility, and others were quick to seize upon these ambiguities to pose a radical challenge to the hierarchical Church. Of these, John Wycliffe provides the most eloquent, influential, and dangerous example.

In many respects Wycliffe simply repeats charges against the wealth and abuses of the Church which were common throughout the medieval period, but he does so in a manner calculated to give these issues the widest popular circulation in an effort to weaken acceptance of the ecclesiastical system as then constituted.[32] Throughout his works, Wycliffe was particularly angered by simony, and with this sin he tends to associate not only the actual buying and selling of Church offices, but also the desertion of parishes by clerics seeking well-paying positions elsewhere. They "sin gravely," says Wycliffe, who desert their sheep for worldly gain.[33] Yet, he charges, the Church is filled with such unfaithful clergy. Even many of those who do not leave their charges are more concerned with receiving payment than in caring for souls, and use

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[32]His success in this effort is evidenced by the debates of the Parliament of 1371. See Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 68.

[33]De Blasphemia, ed. Michael Dziewicki (London: The Wyclif Society, 1893), p. 106.

excommunication as a sort of bribery to exact their tithes.[34] Worldly gain rather than the eternal salvation of men has become the consuming passion of the hierarchy and lesser clergy alike.[35]

Such abuse cannot be allowed to continue, says Wycliffe. Quoting St. Isidore, he states:

> Whether the Church increase or decrease, Christ will require a reckoning from them (the pastors) in the day of Judgment of how they exercized in this ministry the power which He gave them.[36]

While the final reckoning might await the end of the world, Wycliffe is more than prepared to impart some of that reckoning to an erring Church in the present age. In his Trialogus Wycliffe denounces the "donation" of Constantine for providing the occasion for the abuses of wealth and pride which hampered the true mission of the Church.[37] In presenting the Church with lands and other temporal goods, the Emperor beset the Church with the burden of riches and started her craving for more worldly goods. In creating

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[34] Select English Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), III, 217.

[35] "On the Pastoral Office," trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in Advocates of Reform, ed. Matthew Spinka, The Library of Christian Classics, no. 14 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 59.

[36] "On the Pastoral Office," p. 60.

[37] Trialogus, ed. Gotthard Lechler (Oxford: Oxford Oxford University Press, 1869), p. 296.

the necessity of having persons administer these goods he also occasioned the setting up of distinctions of rank in the Church which had not been there before. With these positions came pride, luxurious living, and a disdain for the true spiritual mission of the Church.[38] To the mind of Wycliffe such a corrupt Church simply could not function as the minister of Christ. The hierarchical Church must "cleanse its own spring" before it can minister to the salvation of its people,[39] and the clergy must be composed only of those who would engage in hard work for good rather than of those who sought only a secure income.[40] The only way to reach this goal of ecclesiastical reform, says Wycliffe, is for the excess wealth of the Church to be removed, and for each cleric to receive only enough shelter, food, and clothing to supply his most basic needs.[41] Wycliffe, of course, did not find a receptive audience to such views among the wealthy and influential clergy, and it is to be noted that his own progressive rejection of the

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[38] See also Dialogus, ed. A. W. Pollard (London: The Wyclif Society, 1896), p. 15, and De Blasphemia, p. 3.

[39] "On the Pastoral Office," p. 48.

[40] De Blasphemia, p. 182.

[41] "On the Pastoral Office," p. 26. The development of this position will receive more specific treatment in the section on "Dominion" below.

papacy as the Anti-Christ was in large part caused by papal failure to accept his austere proposals for reform.[42]

In the thought of Wycliffe concern for temporal Church abuse was to lead to more radical ecclesiological positions in the areas of the hierarchy, the sacraments, dominion, and the true constitution of the Church, areas which will receive more consideration in later portions of this chapter. Believing that worldly involvement was the major problem of the fourteenth century Church leading to other abuses, and faced with a reluctance on the part of the institutional Church to reform itself, he was driven to find theological justification for a forcible reformation. This search in turn, as will be demonstrated, was to evolve for him into a new and different conception of the Church. Prelatical abuses of wealth, pride and temporal involvement were thus a springboard for the formation of a radical ecclesiology.

What has been said of Wycliffe in this respect holds at least partially true for the development of fourteenth century ecclesiology in general. Criticism of hierarchical abuse was not unique to the fourteenth century, and certainly all theologians and pious laymen were not prepared to follow Wycliffe to a virtual renewal of the old Donatist position that only a perfectly "pure" institution could

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[42]Lechler, II, 73, 130-31; John Stacey, John Wyclif and Reform (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), pp. 31-32.

really be the Church. Still, the presence of such abuses within it meant that the fourteenth century Church had a definite "image problem." Individuals and situations such as those denounced by Wycliffe made an easy target for imaginative as well as theological writers and made for a more receptive audience for non-traditional solutions and theories, many of which cast questions upon the stable picture of the Church evolved by such theologians as Augustine and Aquinas. The problem of the relation of the Church to worldly wealth and power was to be an important element in several of the ecclesiological disputes of the fourteenth century.

Division in the Church: The Friars and the Schism

In addition to the "image problem" treated above, the fourteenth century Church was beset by open divisions within itself which further affected its stability and hierarchical authority. Of these divisions, those caused by the friars (particularly the Spiritual Franciscans) and by the Great Schism were the most far-reaching and significant.

The Franciscans and the other orders of friars had begun in the thirteenth century as a noble attempt by dedicated men to live a life wholly devoted to God and to the counsels of Christ. Theoretically, the friars were to be an aid to the ministry of the Church, and as it says in the Franciscan Rule approved in 1223, obedience is promised

". . . to our Lord Pope Honorius, and to his successors, and to the Roman Church."[43] Further care was taken in the Rule to stress that the friars were not to interfere with the rights of diocesan bishops (par. 9), that they were to avoid all contact with worldly wealth and scandal (pars. 4-6), and that under the pope and a cardinal governor the friars would be ". . . always submissive and lying at the feet of that same Holy Church, steadfast in the Catholic faith . . . ."

Even before the death of St. Francis, however, disputes had arisen within his order over the degree of poverty which was required of the friars,[44] and these disputes were to play a large part in turning many of the friars into a threat to the authority of the hierarchical Church. All agreed that personal property was not to be owned by individual friars, but two parties had arisen over the question whether the order itself, as a corporation, could hold property. The first party, known as Spirituals, held to the teachings of St. Francis himself, and maintained that all

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[43]"The Rule of S. Francis," par. 1, in Henry Bettenson, ed. and trans., Documents of the Christian Church, 2nd. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 179. The rule is given in this source, pp. 179-84.

[44]Friars controversy details are summarized from Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 61-62, 91-95, and from John Moorman, A History of the Franciscan Order (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 188-204, 307-19. See also R. M. Huber, A Documented History of the Franciscan Order (1182-1517) (Milwaukee: Nowiny Publishing Apostolate, 1944), pp. 138-253.

possession was barred to the friars, either as individuals or as an impersonal corporation. The second party, called Conventuals, argued that such extreme poverty was unnecessary and actually detrimental to the effective functioning of the order. This dispute, in theoretical terms, turned on the question of whether Christ and His Apostles had owned any property, and whether the friars were bound by His counsel to "sell what you have and give to the poor." Implied in this question, of course, was the deeper question of whether the possession of property itself was wrong, and whether a Church which truly wished to follow Christ as his earthly representative could hold worldly wealth. The Conventuals seem always to have had the largest number of adherents, but the dispute continued with such acrimony that in the first decades of the fourteenth century the papacy was drawn in to seek a final solution. Pope Clement V in his Exivi de paradiso (1312) decided against the extreme Spirituals. The dispute continued, however, and in 1323 Pope John XXII decreed heretical the central proposition of the Spirituals that Christ and the Apostles had owned no property. To have done otherwise would have been to leave the entire structure and holdings of the medieval Church in a most threatened position.

These decrees should have settled the question once and for all, but a large minority of the Franciscans rejected the pope's decisions and went into open revolt.

In England the friars generally conformed to the decrees, but many continued to maintain that the Spiritual viewpoint was nevertheless the true one.

The tenacity of the Spirituals in the face of official hierarchical opposition grew out of their basic conception of the Church, i.e., their ecclesiology. Many of them felt that they alone fulfilled the ideal which Christ had set for the Church because their lives conformed more closely to all His teachings than did that of laymen, the secular clergy, or even the pope himself. The Church for them was not the all-embracing institution of Medieval Catholicism, but rather a small "righteous remnant" which had seen the errors of a corrupt hierarchy and alone preserved the true faith. This tendency was most pronounced among the extreme Spirituals who were influenced by the apocalypticism of Joachim of Flora (1145-1202). Joachim had held that a new "dispensation" or spiritual age would begin c. 1260, would be monastic in its orientation, and would be guided by the "Eternal Gospel," i.e., the Christian Gospel in its newly understood "spiritual interpretation."[45] The expected commencement of the "spiritual age" coincided so closely with the rise of the friars that it was natural for some to

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[45]Walker, p. 237. For a view of Joachim's work, see the facsimile edition of Leone Tondelli, Il Libro delle Figure, 2nd. ed. (Torino, Italy: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1953), esp., Vol. II, Plate XI, where the "three ages" are described in diagramatic form.

assume that the friars themselves were the divinely appointed heralds and arbiters of the new dispensation. Among such men was Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, ". . . who had represented the friars as the sole spiritual leaders of the new dispensation in which the hierarchy and all ecclesiastical organization would disappear." Gerard had also referred to the wealthy Church of Rome as "The Whore of Babylon," and to the pope as "Anti-christ."[46]

The Spirituals had received a good measure of support from Pope Nicholas III, and in a desperate attempt to prevent their "true Church" from being corrupted, Spiritual Franciscans such as Pietro Olivi and Richard of Middletown made use of a doctrine of papal infallibility which sought to bind subsequent popes to the decrees of their predecessors.[47] In so doing, the Spirituals were attempting to limit the authority of a present or future pope, for if the decrees of a previous pope were infallible, a future pope who tried to alter his predecessors' teachings and provisions was acting contrary to the truth, and was ipso facto a heretic and no true pope. Such positions were strongly utilized by the Spirituals when in 1322 and 1323 Pope John XXII revoked the decrees of Nicholas III which had favored the Spiritual Franciscans and denied the superiority of

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[46]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 91, 95.

[47]See Tierney, Origins, pp. 65, 93-114, 160.

"apostolic poverty" claimed by the friars. The Spirituals had a strong arguing point, but at last the papacy managed to turn the fraternal doctrine of papal infallibility to its own advantage when John XXII's friend and confidant Guido Terreni accepted the concept of the infallibility of the pope, but also took the obvious and crucial step of saying that it is only the present pope who can infallibly define, interpret, and decide which are the infallible decrees of his predecessors.[48] This step, while it turned one weapon of the Spirituals into a two-edged sword which could cut both ways, did not manage to heal the rift introduced into the Church by the "holy" friars.

In addition to the theoretical threat to the Church posed by the Spiritual Franciscans, the friars as a whole caused doubt and uncertainty by their ubiquitous activity. By the nature of their calling, they functioned outside the established diocesan and parish structures, and their success in collecting offerings for themselves, coupled with their popularity as confessors (thus depriving the parish clergy of much influence over their people) caused no little animosity towards them among the other clergy.[49]

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[48]Tierney, Origins, pp. 239-51, 268.

[49]We may also note that in addition to conflicts with the parish clergy, the friars were involved in a heated dispute with the monks, who were denounced by the radical friars as "defectors" in that the monastic orders owned property though individual monks did not. See Pantin, pp. 166-67; David Knowles, "The Censured Opinions of Uthred of

The seriousness of this conflict, and the issues around which it revolved, may be gauged from the Defensio Curatorum of Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh.[50] In this work, Fitzralph strikes hard at the assertion of some friars that they enjoy a higher calling than the other clergy. He accuses them of wishing to be supreme in the Church, a desire which he attributes to pride and covetousness, observing with bitter irony that this is the very antithesis of their Rule's exaltation of humility and poverty.[51] He further refutes their claim that poverty is superior to possession, and attacks the friars' means of livelihood by showing that begging, far from the ideal, is condemned in word and example by both Jesus and St. Paul.[52] Fitzralph makes it clear, however, that he is not totally against the friars. He says that St. Francis and his Rule were holy and good for the Church, but this good is turned into evil

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Boldon," in The Historian and Character and Other Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 129-70; and Victor Green, The Franciscans in Medieval English Life (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1939), pp. 98-125.

[50]Trans. John of Trevisa and ed. A. J. Perry, Early English Text Society, OS, No. 167 (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 39-93. Fitzralph also composed other works against the friars, notably De Pauperie Salvatoris (1350-56) and a series of sermons at St. Paul's Cross 1356-57). See Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 63-64. See Trevelyan, pp. 143-51.

[51]Defensio, p. 74.

[52]Defensio, pp. 79-87.

by modern friars who corrupt their ideal and explain away all things which oppose their own pride and covetousness.[53]

In spite of his personal reverence for St. Francis, Fitzralph is driven by the assertion of some friars that they alone are the true Church to employ an explicitly ecclesiological argument against them. He cites the image of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven in the Apocalypse 21, which he interprets as the perfect Christian Church coming to earth in the time of the Apostles. He observes that this Church is from God, not St. Francis, and that friars had no place in the essence of this Church: ". . . noon ordre was in Cristes chirche þat helde þe parfitnesse of þe gospel."[54] It is the parish clergy who are provided for in God's plan for his Church, and the parish church is the one sanctuary appointed for the salvation of men, and ". . . þanne alle freres þat bynymeþ parische chirches þe teþinge of þat is y-ȝeue hem oþer biqueþe, beþ acursed."[55]

It is clear that Fitzralph sees the ubiquitous friars as a threat to the stability of the Church, for they wander everywhere and circumvent the right order of the hierarchy

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[53] Defensio, p. 69.

[54] Defensio, pp. 70-71.

[55] Defensio, p. 44. See also pp. 40, 52-54.

and diocesan structures by appealing directly to Rome.[56] Not only do they beguile away revenues from the parishes, but contrary to their Rule they preach without first securing the bishop's permission.[57] Intriguingly, Fitzralph further observes that the friars seek to put at a disadvantage those who would disclose their errors, for they use their "stolen" wealth to buy all copies of available books, and dominate the universities, thus procuring for themselves a monopoly of education.[58] In his attempt to combat this threat to the Church, Fitzralph provides a catalogue of abuses commonly given in anti-fraternal literature: they do all for money, give easy penance to attract business, hover around the dying "as vulturs doþ" to bury them for profit, pry into homes, steal children, seduce women, twist Scripture to their own ends, and despise the poor to cultivate the rich.[59] By such representatives of the Church the true clergy are hampered and laymen are only confused, not helped to salvation.

In his opposition to the friars, Fitzralph was responding to what he perceived as threats to the hierarchical Church as the channel of salvation and pure doctrine under

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[56] Defensio, pp. 60, 67.

[57] Defensio, pp. 47, 65.

[58] Defensio, pp. 58-59.

[59] Defensio, pp. 45-48, 55-57, 60-61, 72-73.

the leadership of pope, bishops, and parish priests. In essence he represents an attempt to re-establish the more secure ecclesiology of the past in the face of a threat from the friars whose attitudes of superiority had begun to raise questions as to where the surest answer to the question of salvation might be found. All of the friars certainly did not go so far as the most radical Spiritual Franciscans, but their assertions did leave the general impression that they, and not the established clergy, were the truest spokesmen for Christ and salvation. As such, whatever the intention of their founders, the friars were a definitely divisive element in the fourteenth century Church. The seeker of salvation could no longer simply ask what the Church taught. Rather, he must decide which group within the Church had the greater share of truth, the more secure means of saving one's soul.

The division in the Church caused by the friars could be very problematical, yet with the Great Schism of 1378 the Church was faced with an obvious and terrifying break which called into question the authority and reliability of the whole ecclesiastical structure, for the Church was left with two canonically elected popes, each claiming to be earthly head of the Body of Christ.[60]

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[60]Moorman, p. 384.

The Great Western Schism began when the cardinals, claiming that undue pressure had been brought to bear on them to elect Urban VI to the papal chair, proceeded to a new election of their own. Their choice fell on Cardinal Robert of Geneva, who chose to be called Clement VII. Urban VI refused to resign, and ridiculed the cardinals' claim that they had been coerced to his election—after all, it was not until four months had passed and the cardinals had decided that they did not like the pope's actions that they had suddenly recalled the "undue force" which had been applied to them. Christian Europe was faced with a choice of which pope to acknowledge, and the choice was a difficult one. Neither Urban VI nor Clement VII had been elected by a splinter group of schismatics, as in the case of previous "anti-popes." Part of Italy, most of Northern Europe, and England continued to recognize Urban VI, while the other part of Italy, segments of Germany, France, and Scotland followed his rival. The visible unity of the Roman Church was shattered, Christian Europe was split down the middle, and there was no ordinarily constituted means for settling the issue. Moreover, no matter to which pope a Christian seeking salvation would submit, the rival pope, chosen by the same official electors, solemnly assured him that he was eternally damned for having made the wrong choice. This was an ecclesiological dilemma of the first magnitude.

Not until the second decade of the fifteenth century would a means out of this perplexity be found—i.e., a supreme General Council called to resolve the issue, basing its authority on the "conciliar theories" of the Church which had long formed a part of canonical tradition, but were brought into prominence by the necessity of resolving the schism.[61] For the earnest Christian of the last part of the fourteenth century, however, this solution was far in the future. The scandal of the schism would embolden some, like Wycliffe, to question the papal authority entirely, but even those who were willing to acknowledge the authority of the hierarchical Church were faced with a dilemma as to where that authority might lie. Staunch conservative defenders of the Church like Bishop Brinton were left wondering if extraordinary measures to restore the unity and credibility of the Church were not called for.[62] Uthred of Boldon, one of the most prominent monks of the period, specifically calls for a General Council to heal the schism, not so much because he believed such a council was superior to the pope, but only to forestall calls for secular intervention, of which there were rumblings afoot, which threatened to place the Church firmly

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[61]For the authoritative treatment of this issue, see Brian Tierney, Foundations of the Conciliar Theory (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1955).

[62]Brinton, Sermons, I, xxx.

under royal or imperial authority.[63] Echoes of the anguish and uncertainty caused by this fracture of the hierarchical Church appear as well in numerous anonymous sermons of the period. As one preacher laments:

> Lo, sirs, I sey itt with soreful hert, scismus and diuisions haue now reyned in oure daies amonge men of holy churche, þat welnyȝ holy churche stands in desolacionem.[64]

The preacher can only feel that this results from a failure of love within the Church, and that this "desolation" of the Church is bound up with a general breakdown of society which threatens the whole of Christian civilization. In another late fourteenth century sermon, the preacher refers to more ideal times in the history of the Church, when holy men like St. Nicholas were chosen as bishops. He wishes that all bishops, especially the pope, might be chosen for similar reasons ". . . for þan we myȝth be secur þat he were very pope; and þan þer shuld be non suche striffe as þer is now for þat office."[65] This cleric associates the problem of clerical wealth discussed above with the schism, for he continues that if the papacy were still as poor as

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[63]Pantin, p. 172.

[64]Sermon 41 in Middle English Sermons, ed. W. O. Ross, Early English Text Society, OS, No. 209 (1940; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 255.

[65]Sermon 9, Middle English Sermons, p. 58.

Christ left it with St. Peter, one man would not be trying to dispute the right to this office with another.

In the words of all these men we may hear a longing for the security of a stable and recognized hierarchical Church. Following the schism, however, as regarded any claimant for the papal chair, it was difficult to be "secur þat he were very pope." Until this breech could be healed, the Church was unable to speak with a united and certain voice, and its ultimate authority was greatly weakened. This was a dilemma, however, which the fourteenth century Church was never able to solve.

The Efficacy of the Sacraments

As was noted above, theologians such as Lombard and especially Aquinas, had systematized the Western Church's thinking on the sacraments, leaving no room for doubt that it was through such spiritual/material channels that God had chosen to deal with men for salvation. As was demonstrated above, however, the thinking of Ockhamism might be used to question such a neatly coherent system, for if its conclusions were accepted, one could no longer logically say that the sacraments were the "most fitting" way for God to deal with his creatures, and in any case, the potentia absoluta might always override the usual system. In a later portion of this section an example will be provided of how such attitudes confronted the authority of the fourteenth

century Church in unexpected but quite significant ways. An even more direct attack on the sacramental system, however, was provided by John Wycliffe as a crucial part of his attack on the claim of the hierarchical Church to be God's appointed agent of salvation.

Wycliffe is perhaps best known for his Eucharistic theology, which opposed the orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation.[66] This opposition grew initially out of his realist philosophy, which could not readily accept the destruction of the essence of the bread and wine which transubstantiation presupposed. To counter this doctrine, Wycliffe proposed the theory of remanence, which did not deny the presence of Christ in the sacrament, but insisted that the essence of the bread and wine remained as well.[67] For him the consecrated species were ". . . in natura substancia et corpus panis et vini et in significacione et figura . . . corpus Christi et sangwis."[68] He did not, however, work out a coherent and comprehensive theory of the Eucharist to compare with that of Aquinas.

Such a position at the very least questioned the authority and accuracy of the Church's teaching, and

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[66]Stacey, pp. 101-08, provides a helpful summary of Wycliffe's concepts of the Eucharist.

[67]De Blasphemia, p. 247. De Eucharistia, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1892), passim, e.g., pp. 32, 49-50, 72, 136, 140, 143.

[68]De Apostasia, ed. M. H. Dziewicki (London: Wyclif Society, 1889), p. 119.

Wycliffe expressly declares that his statements are an effort to weaken the hold of a prideful hierarchy over pious but credulous laymen.[69] His ultimate purpose was to throw into doubt the rigidly institutional view of the Church which saw the clergy as infallible teachers and essential intermediaries between God and the faithful.

This direction of Wycliffe's thought is even more apparent in his teaching on the sacrament of penance, which also included the closely related matter of indulgences. Wycliffe perceived that a most crucial hold of the institutional Church upon its people was the belief that forgiveness of sins, and therefore salvation, was dependent upon priestly absolution. He accuses the clergy of misusing this "authority" to terrify the faithful into subservient obedience on all points. He therefore denies the strict necessity of auricular confession, and insists that forgiveness of sins is from God directly. The clergy can only assure the penitent of God's forgiveness, and have no power to set its terms or withhold it as some claimed.[70] He likewise denies the power of the clergy to determine the specific extent or application of an indulgence, for this too is

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[69] De Eucharistia, p. 15.

[70] De Blasphemia, pp. 112-14. "De Religione Privata," in Polemical Works, ed. Rudolf Buddensieg (London: Wyclif Society, 1893), II, 510.

only in the hands of God.[71] As will be seen later, these assertions went hand in hand with Wycliffe's contention that predestination, not institutional connection, was the real cause of membership in the Church, and all these positions stem from his view of the Church as essentially a "spiritual" rather than a hierarchical body. Such views naturally led to questions as well concerning the place of baptism in incorporating one into the Body of Christ.[72]

From what has been said above, it comes as no surprise that Wycliffe ended by questioning the entire traditional sacramental teaching of the Church, questioning not only the numbering of the sacraments, but also their ultimate necessity.[73] In his remarks on the sacrament of holy orders particularly, he seeks to prove that the hierarchical gradations of the Church are in error, and that Christ instituted a ministry of elders and deacons only.[74] In place of the common idea of the clergy as the authoritative spokesmen

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[71] De Blasphemia, p. 16. De Ecclesia, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1886), pp. 549, 568-69.

[72] E.g., in "Responsiones ad Argumenta Radulfi Strode," Opera Minora, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1913), pp. 177-78, where Wycliffe maintains that true baptism is grace, not water, and that it is reserved for the predestinate alone.

[73] Lechler, II, 166-67. See also De Blasphemia, pp. 111-13, where the traditional understanding of sacramental penance is challenged.

[74] De Blasphemia, pp. 65-67. See also Leff, Heresy in the Later Middle Ages, I, 672-74.

for God and guides of salvation, Wycliffe proposed the "objective" standard of the Scriptures, against which all ecclesiastical decrees were to be weighed by the individual believer.[75] Wycliffe does not deny all place to the sacraments or clergy as aids to grace in the Church on earth, but he does affirm in theory that a godly layman can administer all the sacraments as well as a priest or bishop, and that faced with a corrupt hierarchy such a layman might be called upon to do so.[76] All this being true, it can be seen that in his sacramental theology Wycliffe challenged not only the reliable teaching authority of the institutional Church, but also the position of the hierarchy as dispensers of salvation. This, as will become even more clear in an examination of his theories of predestination and dominion, is the basis for a radical ecclesiology which could give quite a non-traditional answer to the question: "How may I save my soul?"

The radical teachings of Wycliffe on the sacraments were certainly not accepted by all, and they brought forth

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[75] "De Veritate Sacre Scripture," in Opus Evangelicum, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1895-96), III, 173; De Ecclesia, p. 563. For a discussion of Wycliffe's view of Scriptural supremacy, see William Mallard, "John Wyclif and the Tradition of Biblical Authority," Church History, 30 (1961), 51-52; Stacey, pp. 80, 83; Herbert Workman, John Wyclif (Oxford, 1926; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), II, 150.

[76] "De Quattuor Sectis Novellis," Polemical Works, I, 259. "Responsiones ad Argumenta Radulfi Strode," Opera Minora, p. 178. Workman, II, 312.

angry defenses of more traditional understandings. Among these, that of Bishop Brinton provides a conspicuous example.[77] Nevertheless, in the period after Ockham even the most respected and usually "anti-radical" theologians might bring forth theories which questioned the efficacy of the Church and its sacraments quite as effectively as did the open and obvious attacks of Wycliffe. Of these, Uthred of Boldon stands as a supreme example.

Uthred of Boldon was one of the most respected members of the Benedictine Order of his day, held a doctorate from Oxford, and served his order first as prior of Finchale and later as sub-prior of the great monastery of Durham.[78] His honored place among the Benedictines is attested to not only by his service as prior, but also by his frequent assignment as official visitor to monasteries affiliated with Durham.[79] He was also well-known outside the order, for he was sent by the king to Avignon in 1373 as a special envoy in the question of clerical provisions and subsidies. Moreover, by common consent, Uthred was an acknowledged leader of the English monks (possessioners) in the continuing

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[77]Brinton, Sermons, I, xxxi; II, 462.

[78]Biographical details are from Pantin, pp. 166-67; see also Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 48-53.

[79]See Documents Illustrating the Activities of the General and Provincial Chapters of the English Black Monks 1215-1540, ed. W. A. Pantin, Camden Society, 3rd. series (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1931-37), III, 279.

controversy with the Spiritual Franciscans over the nature and value of apostolic poverty. In 1366-1368 specifically, he produced two treatises refuting the Franciscan charges that they alone fulfilled the ideal of Christ for his Church, and that orders of monks by holding property had defected from the faith. Uthred's works present the usual rebuttals to the friars, with more than usual clarity. Such productions were not inclined to endear him to the friars, and in 1367 or 1368 a certain friar, William Jordan by name, sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury a list of twenty-two statements drawn from Uthred's writings which were challenged as heretical.[80] The Archbishop was himself a Benedictine and hated to condemn a prominent member of his order at the instigation of the "quarrelsome" friars. Uthred's propositions, however, were obviously contrary to the sacramental teaching of the Church, and placed the Church itself in a very ambiguous position. They were therefore forbidden to be taught, though the official condemnation did not name Uthred as the author, and for good measure eight of William Jordan's own statements were also declared unorthodox.

On the one hand, Uthred of Boldon as the champion of the possessioners was as far as one can imagine from William of Ockham and his more radical associates. On the other,

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[80]Knowles, "Censured Opinions," pp. 168-69.

his "censured opinions" clearly show the imprint of a portion of Ockhamist thought. The Ockhamists' emphasis on the potentia absoluta and its destructive effect on traditional views of the Church, grace, and salvation has already been discussed. By the time of Uthred, many theologians were so caught up in this idea that ". . . God was becoming the Immediate Universal Ordinary, overriding at His own will and pleasure the normal working of His laws for creatures and for His church."[81] It was from such a perspective that Uthred had posited the foremost and seminal idea which had led to the condemnation of his twenty-two statements. As Knowles summarizes:

> This was the opinion that all human beings, whether adults, children, or still-born infants, enjoyed at the moment immediately preceding death a clear vision (clara visio) of God. In the light of that vision the soul chose or rejected God, and by that choice its lot was determined for eternity.[82]

Uthred was not proposing that all persons receive a divine "second chance" after death, for the clara visio was granted in the moment before death. The choice for or against God in the earthly life still determined the eternal life, as in traditional Catholic teaching. The problem was that Uthred contended that all persons, Christians, unbaptized infants, pagans, and obstinate sinners received the same

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[81]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 76.

[82]Knowles, "Censured Opinions," pp. 138-39.

clara visio. At the same time, he gave no indication that one's past life had any effect whatsoever on the kind of choice made at the moment of death. The sinner and the unbaptized infant might receive a chance for heaven, it is true, but the saint and the baptized child might also reject God and be lost at the last instant.

In practice, then, Uthred's theory was totally destructive of the Church's sacramental teaching. The sacrament of baptism was of no real use, even to a dying infant, and the other rites, ceremonies, and good works of the Church, even the Church itself, became meaningless.[83] The Eucharist might indeed confer grace, but that grace had no ultimate effect on a person's eternal destiny. Likewise, the sacrament of penance might forgive one's sins, but the only forgiveness that really mattered was that connected with the clara visio. The Catholic Church might praise God, but membership or non-membership in it was meaningless for salvation. Perhaps without meaning to, Uthred had undermined the authoritative position of the Church as thoroughly as had Wycliffe.

These examples of Wycliffe and Uthred of Boldon give some indication of the crisis the fourteenth century Church faced in regard to the sacraments. One may also begin to see something of how various challenges to the Church, e.g.,

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[83]Knowles, "Censured Opinions," pp. 139-44.

Ockhamism, the friars controversy, and new views of the sacraments, impinged on one another and combined to render a stable ecclesiology more difficult. In this regard, it is also instructive to note with Knowles that Uthred's specific statements on the doctrine of grace included in the charges against him were simply passed over without comment. In an earlier or later time these opinions too would have been unacceptable, but in the mid-fourteenth century opinions on "grace" and its transmission were so fluid that churchmen were unclear as to what was and what was not heretical on the subject.[84] By all these things the authority of the Church was questioned, intentionally or not, and the nature of its function in salvation was obscured.

Free-Will and Predestination

The problem of free-will and predestination was certainly not unique to the fourteenth century. Both concepts are Biblical, St. Augustine is well-known for his statements on the subject,[85] and Aquinas had succeeded in harmonizing both ideas without feeling that they caused a threat to the teaching or authority of the traditional Church. In the fourteenth century, however, perceptions of

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[84]Knowles, "Censured Opinions," p. 150.

[85]For a discussion of predestination in the thought of Augustine, see Peter R. L. Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 398-407.

the tensions between human free-will and divine predestination became acute, controversy abounded, and in the end predestination was able to be used as a means of challenging the authority and position of the organizational Church.

Like many other issues which agitated the minds of fourteenth century Christians, the problem of free-will and predestination was brought to the fore by the speculations of Ockham and his radical followers. As might be supposed from what has been said before, the Ockhamist view of predestination was very limited indeed. Predestination, while not denied entirely, was essentially reduced to God's knowledge of what was to be, and even this was not absolute, but rather God's knowledge of contingencies which might or might not be actualized.[86] Some, like Mary, might be saved by the pure will of God, but in general the whole question of predestination, particularly as a causative factor in salvation, was a "magis dubium."[87] Hand in hand with these ideas went the Ockhamist emphasis on the free-will of man, with the acceptance by God of any act of the will, not "habitual grace," being seen as the only real basis of merit for salvation. Such concepts, particularly as they were utilized by Ockham's more radical followers, were

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[86]See the Adams/Kretzman translation of Ockham's treatise Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents, passim, esp. pp. 3-6, 11, 34-45.

[87]Leff, Ockham, p. 469. The whole question of Ockham's views on predestination is discussed pp. 468-70.

hardly in keeping with the traditional teaching of the Church or its program of salvation.

These Ockhamist statements on free-will and predestination brought forth a spirited counter-attack from Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290-1349), who feared that Ockham, and particularly his radical followers, in making all things contingent and God himself essentially unknowable, were posing a grave threat to the authority and position of the traditional Church.[88] He therefore very consciously turns to the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, rather than to the theologians of the via moderna for his understanding of God, the Church, and the means of salvation.[89] This explains why his works abound in quotes of "authorities" to an extent unusual even in scholastic literature, for he wishes ". . . to emphasise that the truth proclaimed by the Church is being threatened, whereas the opponents can only refer to the authorities by misrepresenting their original intention."[90] Against the scepticism of the Ockhamists he put forth the Scriptures as God's sure revelation to man:

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[88]Heiko A. Oberman, Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine, A Fourteenth Century Augustinian: A Study of His Theology in its Historical Context (Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon, 1957), p. 105.

[89]Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 113, 116-17.

[90]Oberman, Bradwardine, pp. 22-23.

> Quare constat Sacram Scripturam quam Pater sanctificavit et misit in mundum, ratione sui Autoris inerrabilis, in firmitate et certitudine authenticis omnibus aliis incomparabiliter praeferendam.[91]

He also leaves no doubt that the Scriptures are to be interpreted "secundum expositiones Sanctorum."[92]

Bradwardine was most incensed at the Ockhamists' exaltation of the free-will of man to such an extent that God's knowledge was reduced to mere contingency, and man's will, not grace, had become the determiner of salvation. Bradwardine called his opponents "Modern Pelagians," and saw himself as a sort of modern Augustine defending the truth of God and his Church. He did not set out to deny human freedom, but strove to exalt the "necessity" of God's foreknowledge in opposition to the radical contingency of the Ockhamists. In an attempt to synthesize the divine necessity and the free-will of man, he asserted that God's will is the causa coefficiens of all human action: ". . . cuiuslibet actus voluntatis creatae Deus est necessarius coeffector."[93] This divine "co-efficiency" is inextricably

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[91] De Causa Dei, ed. Henry Saville (London, 1618), II, 31, 606C.

[92] De Causa Dei, II, 31, 604E.

[93] De Causa Dei, II, 20, 540B. Oberman, Bradwardine, pp. 76-77; Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 297; K. B. McFarlane, John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Non-Conformity (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 30.

bound up with the ultimate "divine necessity,"[94] for it was through this means that the Divine Will was actualized.

Such statements lead directly to questions of predestination,[95] and here again Bradwardine makes his own assertions in reaction to Ockhamistic indeterminacy. He is incensed by the idea that human beings, even by good works, could affect the supreme will of God, which for him must remain immutable as a basis for sure belief. He therefore asserts that those who persevere to salvation do so only by the prior grace of predestination, while the reprobate, though lacking this necessary grace, must nonetheless bear the blame for their just condemnation.[96] It is from such a perspective that in speaking of the sacrament of penance, Bradwardine can insist that while man's sins are forgiven following true contrition, sorrow for one's sins is itself a gift of grace, i.e., man does not repent and then merit grace, but rather God gives the elect grace that they may repent.[97]

In all of his statements on free-will and predestination Bradwardine was attempting to defend the authority of

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[94] Oberman, Bradwardine, p. 83.

[95] Bradwardine deals with predestination in De Causa Dei, I, esp. chs. 23, 25, 34, 35, 44 and 47. See Oberman, Bradwardine, p. 114.

[96] De Causa Dei, I, 45, 421D; I, 47, 441B. Oberman, Bradwardine, pp. 115-20.

[97] De Causa Dei, I, 43, 377D. Oberman, Bradwardine, p. 163.

God and the Church against what he saw as the encroachments of the "Modern Pelagians." He sought for an immutable God and revelation to place against the "contingent" Deity of the radical Ockhamists. Yet, his own extreme reaction to these speculations itself had within it elements which likewise tended to undermine the position of the Church as God's agent of salvation. He himself alludes to objections of his opponents that his stress on predestination removes religious certainty from man, since it is immutable predestinating grace and not the reception of the sacraments and good works which brings man salvation.[98] Bradwardine countered by saying that only in total divine sovereignty could man have security, and that the only real freedom is in fulfilling the will of God. Still, his own words give support to the accusation that the prayers, rites, and ceremonies of the Church have no ultimate effect in salvation:

> Nec preces aut quaecunque merita bona vel mala flectant aut mutant voluntatem divinam. Omne salvandum aut damnandum . . . voluit [Deus] ab aeterno salvari vel damnari . . . nedum voluntate conditionali aut indeterminata, sed ita absoluta et determinate.[99]

Bradwardine himself tried to minimize the determinism leading to fatalism which his assertions implied, and took pains to deny the conclusion that if the sovereign will of God is

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[98] De Causa Dei, II, 34, 630A.

[99] De Causa Dei, I, 23, 240D/E.

the cause of all it must also be the cause of evil,[100] but it is nevertheless true that his statements on free-will and predestination raised as many questions for the Church as they answered. The human will, at the very least, appears to be reduced to a passive accepter of the sovereign Divine will on matters affecting salvation, though on the other hand its acceptance is all important. It is also ironic, but fully in keeping with the tortuous and often mystifying progress of fourteenth century ecclesiological polemics, that Bradwardine's emphasis on predestination was later taken up by Wycliffe and used to attack the very institutional Church which Bradwardine had sought to defend.

In defining his own positions on free-will and predestination Wycliffe owes much to Bradwardine, whom he calls Doctor Profundus,[101] particularly in his emphasis on the Divine at the expense of the human will.[102] Wycliffe, however, is very conscious of the charges that Bradwardine's positions might seem to make God the author of sin as well as of good, and he takes care to emphasize that while God may be the ultimate cause of all action, man is still responsible for sin, since evil is really in the consenting

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[100] Oberman, Bradwardine, pp. 79-81.

[101] De Dominio Divino, ed. R. L. Poole (London: Wyclif Society, 1890), p. 115.

[102] McFarlane, p. 30.

individual will (propter maliciam voluntatis).[103] Like all who write on the subject, Wycliffe experienced a tension in trying to maintain enough freedom of the will for man to make him culpable for his sins without at the same time infringing upon the divine sovereignty.[104] As one scholar observes: "The only qualification to be made is that as Wyclif grew older, the sovereign will of God loomed larger in his thought than the freewill of man."[105]

Wycliffe's subordination of the human to the Divine will resulted in predestinarianism, and this in turn directly affected his concept of the Church. For him, the Church in its truest sense was the totality of the predestinate (congregacio omnium predestinatorum), stretching back into the past to the first man to be saved, and reaching into the future to include the last.[106] Such a concept is hardly original with Wycliffe, for St. Paul, Augustine, and countless other theologians had made similar statements.[107] It is more the use to which Wycliffe put the idea of the Church

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[103] De Dominio Divino, p. 117. De Ente, ed. M. H. Dziewicki (London: Wyclif Society, 1909), p. 188.

[104] De Dominio Divino, pp. 125-36.

[105] Stacey, p. 98.

[106] De Ecclesia, p. 2. De Civili Dominio, ed. R. L. Poole and Johann Loserth, 4 vols. (London: Wyclif Society, 1885-1904), I, 381.

[107] Leff, Bradwardine, p. 261 finds the "germ" of Wycliffe's particular use of this concept in Bradwardine's writings.

of the predestinate rather than the basic idea itself which makes it critical to his ecclesiology. Wycliffe was a rather extreme philosophical realist, and accordingly for him it was the "Idea" rather than its earthly reflection which was in the truest sense "real."[108] As Wycliffe combined his realism and his predestination, it was not the hierarchical organization, but rather ". . . it was the church as the idea of God, as a 'universal' which was the true Church of Christ."[109]

The "true Church" must be distinguished from the often corrupt earthly hierarchical institution, and becomes an essentially intangible spiritual entity. The "foreknown" or "reprobate" may be _in_ the earthly organization but in no sense are they ever _of_ the Body of Christ, and Wycliffe compares them to the waste elements (_excrementa_) in the human body.[110] The institutional Church cannot be synonymous with the "True Church," for it is by nature a "mixed" body, as Augustine himself had admitted.[111] The logical and doggedly consistent mind of Wycliffe was not content to reach a compromise solution to the dilemma of the institutional and ideal Churches as many before him had done.

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[108]S. Harrison Thomson, "The Philosophical Basis of Wyclif's Theology," _Journal of Religion_, 11 (1931), 102-03.

[109]Stacey, p. 100.

[110]"De Fide Catholica," _Opera Minora_, p. 99.

[111]_De Doctrina Christiana_, III, 32 (Migne, _PL_, 34:82).

Faced with a dichotomy between the ideal and the institutional Church, Wycliffe threw himself squarely on the side of the ideal, taking the critical step of denying that the institutional Church necessarily had a direct correspondence with the true Church of God's ideal. In the thought of Wycliffe, one was a member of the true Church through the eternal predestination of God, and this predestination was not dependent on the arbitrary will of any earthly prelate or priest. Membership in the "Church," as contrasted with the hierarchical institution, was by predestinating grace, not ecclesiastical obedience, and as Stacey observes: "The predestination at the root of it was something which no priest could give and no priest take away. It was given or withheld by God to the individual."[112] Conversely, since the Church of the predestinate was not necessarily synonymous with the organizational Church, membership, even high office, in the organizational Church was no guarantee that one was in the true Church,[113] and the teaching and commands of the hierarchy might righteously be resisted. In his earlier years Wycliffe was inclined to grant some authority in the Church even to "foreknown" clerics, but later his views on this hardened considerably.[114] Secure in his

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[112]Stacey, p. 101.

[113]Stacey, p. 100.

[114]See, e.g., De Blasphemia, pp. 11, 106. See also Workman, II, 13.

beliefs concerning the Church of the Predestinate, Wycliffe felt justified for questioning and rebelling against the authority of the hierarchical corporation.

Wycliffe's ideas indeed gave a theoretical ground for resisting abuses in the institutional Church, but they caused problems for the seeker of salvation as well. While the quality of one's life might give some indication of membership in the Church of the Predestinate, this test was not an absolute, and no one could know for certain if he were of the predestinate or not. Wycliffe himself is forced to grapple with the fact that this makes the Church something of an "unknown quantity."[115] So, as a result of his use of predestination, the Church in the thought of Wycliffe becomes more and more an invisible fellowship known only to God. The hierarchy and the congregatio fidelium count for little as authority for salvation. The individual believer can better resist ecclesiastical abuses, but he can no longer be certain whether he himself is ultimately on the path to salvation or damnation, and the place of the human faculty of the will in affecting salvation is thrown into doubt. The final result of such tendencies is an anxious ecclesiology, and the individual is left more on his own to grapple with the question "How may I save my soul?"

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[115]"De Fide Catholica," Opera Minora, p. 100. See also Lechler, II, 106.

The Concept of Dominion

Like numerous other controversies which raged in the fourteenth century Church, that of "Dominion," or more properly "Dominion by Grace," added its share to the crisis of authority which challenged the organizational Church. In the briefest possible terms, the basic thesis of the concept of Dominion is that the final authority in all things, whether spiritual or temporal, resides with God. All authority or "lordship" held by humans is simply in trust. No human ever has an absolute right to any authority, and all such authority as may be given to him properly remains his only so long as he fulfills its functions as God wills. Once a person misuses position, property, or authority he in fact loses all real claim to such position, property, or authority. Such a thesis was obviously open to differing interpretations and dispute, and the battle which the concept of Dominion aroused was as destructive as any of ecclesiastical stability and authority, illustrating in its convoluted development something of the uncertainty with which the fourteenth century Christian had to contend.

In 1302 the Austin Friar Giles of Rome set forth his ideas on Dominion and Grace in the treatise De ecclesiastica potestate. Giles' use of the concept was calculated to reinforce in the strongest possible way the authority and rule of the hierarchical Church. As Dom David Knowles observes:

> In this treatise, which is throughout an assertion of papal claims in their most extreme form, Giles maintained that dominion can only exist within the Church or with the permission of the Church, and that in fact only faithful Christians can have just dominion since they alone can derive their right through the Church from Christ the supreme Lord of all things.[116]

Giles' theories were to receive varying interpretations by his followers in later years, but his basic position was so intensely institutional and pro-papal that many of his ideas were adopted wholesale into that ultimate declaration of Church sovereignty, the Unam Sanctam of Pope Boniface VIII.[117] As used in this context the concept of Dominion is supportive of positions which identified the true Church of Christ most closely with the visible hierarchical corporation presided over by the pope. In order to save one's soul, one has only to acknowledge the authority of this institution in all areas of life, for all rule and authority depend upon it. In such a view, the organizational Church represents the ultimate manifestation in the visible world of the grand theological order of Augustine and Aquinas.

In the fourteenth century especially, however, arguments had a way of turning upon their proponents, and as

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[116]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 61. In this volume, pp. 61-67, Knowles provides an excellent account of the entire Dominion issue. Also see A. Gwynn, The English Austin Friars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 59-73.

[117]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 312; Religious Orders, II, 62.

the Spiritual Franciscan theory of papal infallibility had been turned back upon them by the pro-papalists,[118] so now the concept of Dominion was utilized by the Spirituals against the papacy. Based on their key premise that absolute poverty was the ideal Christian existence, the Spirituals asserted that in its lavish possession of riches the Church of the papacy and hierarchy had sinned, i.e., lost grace, and that therefore by its own definition the hierarchical Church had lost its right to possessions or authority over men.[119] In an extreme form such ideas could be used to deny hierarchical authority entirely, though they might also form an added argument, as with Ockham, for defining and limiting this authority.[120] The danger of such theories for the institutional Church, however, is amply illustrated by the secularist Marsilius of Padua, who in his Defensor Pacis (1324) was able to advocate the expropriation of ecclesiastical property and effectual control of the Church by temporal authorities.[121]

Still, the progress of the concept of Dominion was to reverse itself again in the hands of Archbishop Fitzralph,

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[118]Tierney, Origins, pp. 239-51, 268.

[119]Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 63.

[120]Boehner, "Ockham's Political Ideas," in Collected Articles on Ockham, pp. 447-48.

[121]Alan Gewirth, trans., Marsilius of Padua, The Defender of Peace, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951-56).

and it became an important weapon in his conflict with the friars. In his De Pauperie Salvatoris[122] he discusses at great length Dominion in all its possible aspects, carefully distinguishing the right of use (ius utendi) from property (proprietas), lordship (dominio), and possession (possessio) in direct contradiction of the radical Franciscan authors on the subject.[123] In the latter books of this treatise, however, he is also able to assert that the friars, far from being the "True Church," were so corrupt that they had lost all right to the privileges granted them by the popes, and should therefore be suppressed.[124] In this case the concept of Dominion functions once again as a means of defending the position and authority of the traditional ecclesiastical organization.

It should come as no surprise, however, that a concept which had changed sides so many times before was once again to be employed to challenge the hierarchical institution, this time as an important plank in the program of Wycliffe. Like most writers who made use of the concept of Dominion, Wycliffe asserts that while God may give the use of authority or possessions to men, this in no sense means that he

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[122]Books I-IV of this treatise are printed in Poole's edition of Wycliffe's De Dominio Divino, pp. 257-476.

[123]Fitzralph, De Pauperie Salvatoris, IV, 22 in De Dominio Divino, pp. 475-76.

[124]A lengthy table of contents of the last three books of Fitzralph's treatise is provided by Poole in De Dominio Divino, pp. 264-72. Knowles, Religious Orders, II, 64.

renounces his immediate "lordship" and rights over such authority or possessions.[125] The hierarchical Church may have been established as God's intended vehicle of salvation for men, but this hierarchical authority is valid only so long as the Church acts and rules according to the will of God. As was noted above, Wycliffe felt that the hierarchical Church had misused its God-given authority on several counts, and the concept of Dominion therefore gave him a theoretical basis for resisting ecclesiastical authority and a "practical" means for reforming the institution.

On the theological level, the concept of Dominion meant for Wycliffe that the organizational Church has authority to teach and order only what God wills. This, at first glance, is a non-debatable point to which even the most ardent pro-papalist could agree. Wycliffe, however, disputed the conclusion that whatever the hierarchy decrees is ipso facto the will of God, for Scripture alone, not the hierarchy, is the infallible spokesman and interpreter of the will of God.[126] The Christian may receive the true faith from the Scriptures alone without the teaching of the hierarchy, and it is to Scripture, not Church officials, that he must be obedient.[127] Far from being absolute authorities, the

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[125] De Dominio Divino, pp. 418-19. De Civili Dominio, I, 28.

[126] De Civili Dominio, I, 378.

[127] De Civili Dominio, I, 377, 379.

hierarchy may err, and so their decrees are not guaranteed the authority of the Holy Spirit.[128] The Christian is called to be submissive to God, not an institution, and it is his duty, even if he is a layman, to oppose and correct an erring hierarchy.[129] In this attempt the Christian is not to fear an official decree of excommunication, for such decrees themselves are an abuse of the Dominion granted by God, and in any case can have no effect on the predestinate.[130] Faced with prelatical abuse on a large scale, Wycliffe is even prepared to discuss the possibility that the true Church on earth may be composed almost entirely of laymen: ". . . possibile est ecclesiam Christi pro morula viacionis preeminenter residere in laycis."[131]

On the practical level of correcting the erring hierarchical corporation, Wycliffe held that the contemporary evils in the Church arose from its superabundant possessions, and like many before him he traced the beginnings of the institution's "defection" to the "donation of Constantine."[132] In harmony with a portion of the teaching of the Spiritual Franciscans, Wycliffe maintained that Christ

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[128] *De Civili Dominio*, I, 410. The pope, in fact, may be a heretic (*De Civili Dominio*, II, 121).

[129] *De Civili Dominio*, II, 63, 74-75.

[130] *De Civili Dominio*, II, 262; I, 370.

[131] *De Civili Dominio*, III, 258.

[132] *De Civili Dominio*, III, 217, 232.

himself had held no property and did not intend for his Church to do so.[133] Since God had not intended temporal wealth for the Church, the institutional Church by accepting or taking riches had ipso facto lost its right to hold such properties. God, however, who provides a remedy for every ill,[134] had likewise provided a solution to the problem of a wealthy Church. Wycliffe's contention that pious laymen have a duty to correct an erring clergy has already been noted. In the case of temporal possessions, Wycliffe maintained that the secular state, which was likewise properly an agent of God, had the right and duty to strip away riches from the Church.[135]

Wycliffe asserted that such an appropriation of Church property would open the possibility for the institutional Church to return to the proper spiritual mission of the "true" Church, and he emphasized that the state was to support and maintain, not tyrannize the Church.[136] The concept of Dominion as used by Wycliffe, however, was a serious challenge to the authority of the hierarchical Church, and many, less trustful than he of the "pious" secular authorities, clearly perceived the danger. It was clearly to the

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[133] De Civili Dominio, III, 114, 166-67, 233. The Church may use worldly goods for the welfare of souls, but not amass wealth for itself (De Civili Dominio, III, 220-22).

[134] De Civili Dominio, I, 267.

[135] De Civili Dominio, I, 266; III, 259-60.

[136] E.g., De Civili Dominio, I, 268; II, 71.

statements of Wycliffe on Dominion that Bishop Brinton was referring when he warned of the intentions of John of Gaunt:

> Against the Church rise the lords temporal, who gather to themselves masters, who have itching ears [II Timothy 4:3] and support the lords in obvious errors to the end that the church has no right, no privilege, no dominion, unless in their judgment these should be left to it.[137]

It is not necessary to judge here the subsequent historical accuracy of Bishop Brinton's remarks, but the possibility of secular domination was there, and in any case Wycliffe's statements on Dominion had provided a radical basis for disputing the purely spiritual as well as the temporal authority of the hierarchical Church. As such, the concept of Dominion had developed through several surprising permutations from a bastion of pro-papalism into an argument which could challenge as well as defend the institutional Church.

Conclusion

The preceding pages have shown that the general development of ecclesiology up to the fourteenth century was one of increasing systematization of belief and assurance that

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[137]Mary Aquinas Devlin, trans., "Bishop Thomas Brinton and his Sermons," Speculum, 14 (1939), 341. The original reads: "Insurgent contra ecclesiam domini temporales coaceruantes sibi magistros auribus prurientes et eos in manifestis erroribus confouentes ad finem quod ecclesie nullum ius, nullum privilegium, nullum dominium nisi de eorum arbitrio censeant reliquendum, . . ." Brinton, Sermons, I, 68. See also Pantin, p. 184.

the institutional Church was God's authoritative guide for the salvation of mankind. Though they approached the issue from somewhat differing perspectives, neither Augustinians nor Thomists doubted that the organizational Church was a divine as well as an earthly institution which spoke with the voice of God. In the light of such ecclesiologies, salvation becomes a simple matter: Follow the teachings of Holy Church without exception.

The development of fourteenth century thought, however, rendered matters rather more difficult than that, resulting in a very real crisis of authority for the Church. Ockhamism, particularly in the hands of Ockham's radical followers, had effectively sundered the bond of faith and reason upon which the Church's traditional understanding of itself had been based. Furthermore, a series of disputes and theories, discussed above, had sprung up, and in their individual and cumulative effect these served to challenge the more stable ecclesiologies of the past. Some of these, such as predestination and the Great Schism, had an obvious bearing on an explicitly ecclesiological issue: "What is the true Church?" Others, such as the issue of prelatical abuses and the efficacy of the sacraments, served to cast doubt on traditional views of the Church, and led to further questioning and uncertainty. The reader will also have noticed that these issues prove to be so intertwined that it is difficult to consider one without at the same time

raising the others. The concept of Dominion offers a case in point, for it poses questions of the righteousness of the hierarchy and the ultimate efficacy of the ministrations of the organizational Church, and was developed in close connection with the disputes of the Spiritual Franciscans, who themselves had evolved a view of the Church as a "righteous remnant" rather than a universal society.

In addition, the various positions taken on the issues discussed above provided the fourteenth century Christian with a bewildering array of choices for grappling with the ecclesiological ramifications of the various disputes. Augustinianism and Thomism were not simply displanted by Ockhamism, and pro-papalism did not neatly give way to Wycliffism. Advocates of all shades of thought continued to exist side by side, and to further complicate the issue, fourteenth century thought tended to become very eclectic, choosing portions of differing traditional modes of thought for its own purposes. Leff speaks of the time as presenting ". . . a confusing welter of doctrines . . ."[138] and in characterizing the century says: ". . . it is a time of eclecticism and shifting currents . . . if ever an age defied pigeon-holes and categories it is the fourteenth century."[139] Knowles voices agreement with these sentiments, and touches on the effect of such a period on

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[138]Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 272.

[139]Leff, Medieval Thought, p. 261.

individual believers. Men were often left ". . . without any clear knowledge as to what was of immemorial tradition in the church and what was the speculation of recent schoolmen or the claim of papal propagandists."[140] As a result of the barrage of new ideas and acrimonious disputes, the self-confidence of both men and institutions, even that of the Church, had been severely shaken.

For the fourteenth century Christian all this makes of vital concern questions which might have seemed to Aquinas self-evident. What is the Church? Where is it found? Is it a visible hierarchical institution or an invisible assembly of the predestinate? Might it be both—or neither? The problem of finding a convincing authority to decide these issues was a crucial one, for to any question the seeker might receive a dozen conflicting answers. Which of them was right? If one asked, "How may I save my soul?" the answer as always might be "Follow the teachings of Holy Church!" In the atmosphere of the time, however, such an answer is nearly meaningless, at least until the questioner has been able to work his way through a bewildering maze of issues surrounding this answer: problems of predestination; who (if any) is the true pope; is the organizational Church and its sacraments essential for salvation, or does the corruption of the institutional earthly Church mean that

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[140]Knowles, Evolution of Medieval Thought, p. 332.

one must look elsewhere for the spokesman of Christ? The fourteenth century Christian who displays uncertainty over any of these matters, far from being an oddity, is clearly reflecting the temper of the time and the crisis of Church authority which inflamed it. The modern reader who wishes to follow the spiritual journey of a fourteenth century seeker of salvation must therefore expect to encounter a wrestling with these issues, and he must likewise be prepared to find a variety of perspectives in the thought of a single man.

From what has already been said, the reader should begin to see the magnitude of the problem which an author such as Langland was confronting, and to appreciate the centrality of questions of ecclesiology and Church authority for enabling the reader to follow him in his pilgrimage. Before turning to Piers Plowman directly, however, in an attempt to trace the specific role of such matters in Langland's work, it will first prove helpful to consider how certain other fourteenth century poets handled similar issues.

CHAPTER IV

ECCLESIOLOGY IN IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

Introduction

The preceding pages have endeavored to outline the prevailing theological climate on the question of ecclesiology at the time Langland was composing Piers Plowman. Little has been said, however, about the use of such themes by other imaginative writers of the period. Langland was certainly not the only author to worry about the Church, and before proceeding to a close examination of Piers Plowman in the light of the theologians, it will be helpful to devote some attention to other imaginative writers who also wrestled with the same ecclesiological tensions as did he.

As is the case in so many areas, the names of Dante and Chaucer claim foremost consideration, and Gower provides helpful insights as well. It is true that in the works of many authors, ecclesiastical matters might serve to provide only topical allusions or surface ornament, just as figures from current political or social debates dot the pages of much modern fiction. In the hands of a Dante or a Chaucer, however, such theological questions could not only receive truly artistic treatment, but also enter as a crucial

element into the substance of the works themselves. Gower likewise deals in a serious way with questions concerning the Church. This makes ecclesiology the concern of the literary as well as of the Church historian, and Dante's, Chaucer's, and Gower's use of these issues offers precedents, parallels, and points of comparison for evaluating the appearance and utlization of the same or similar questions and tensions within the work of Langland. Space and a sense of proportion forbid an overly exhaustive examination of the Commedia, the Canterbury Tales, or the Vox Clamantis; but even a brief analysis will provide helpful background for better understanding what Langland himself has attempted in this area, and what he has accomplished.

Dante

Although Dante wrote before all of the issues of the fourteenth century ecclesiological crisis had received their full development, he nevertheless offers an instructive view of how questions concerning the Church may figure in works of imaginative literature. In his Commedia the ideal Church of the theologians is translated into the realm of art, and made into poetry of the highest order. As Karl Vossler observes,

> The long labors of the great church Fathers, apostles and saints are here, for the first and last time, made

> wholly present and living by the fiery spirit of a layman. . . .[1]

Such florid praise may strike uncomfortably on the ears of modern readers, but those who with C. H. Grandgent have sensed the stirring "intensity" with which Dante imbued his work's treatment of the most medieval of themes[2] will readily agree that superlatives flow naturally in evaluating the Florentine's achievement.

Surely few passages in any literature equal the shining climax of the Commedia when Dante, approaching the end of his long pilgrimage, beholds the pristine glory of the Church Triumphant in the image of the dazzling White Rose.[3] In the final canto Dante confesses that his poetic powers cannot describe the fullness of the divine beauty, but what he has described has scaled the heights of human art. His vision must speak for itself, for its artistry defies summation or translation.

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[1]Medieval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times, trans. W. C. Lawton (1929; rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1958), I, 88.

[2]C. H. Grandgent, ed., Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia, rev. by Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. xxi-xxii. Quotations and citations from the Commedia in the text are from this edition.

[3]Dorothy L. Sayers, trans., The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), III, xxx.

The reader, even as he becomes entranced with the beauty of Dante's heavenly portrayal of God and his heavenly Church, must remember that the poet has had a long hard climb to reach this beatific vision, not only through the circles of saints in heaven, but also up the Mountain of Purgatory, even from the very depths of Hell itself. In Heaven the Church is perfectly one, reflecting the pure light of its Lord, and the theologians in the Circle of the Sun (Paradiso, X-XIV) join in mutual praise, all their differences of perspective reconciled by the glory of God himself.[4] This, however, presupposes that there are differences which require reconciliation, just as the necessity for a Hell reveals that the perfection of Heaven is not necessarily completely present in the realms below. Dante has found that the transition from an earthly to a heavenly existence is not an easy one, and throughout his work he has had to grapple with a disparity between the perfection of the Church as seen in heaven and the ecclesiastical organization on earth. Since the Commedia, on whatever level one reads it, concerns a pilgrimage to the salvation of heaven, and since the Church by its very nature is to be the vehicle of salvation, the question of the earthly Church's faithfulness to its calling and mission looms large throughout. Though only the first few lines of the

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[4]See Étienne Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, trans. David Moore (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1949), p. 250.

Commedia literally take place "on earth," at no time, even in the Empyrean itself, does the poet lose sight of earthly matters, for the eternal fate of all is determined by success or failure in fulfilling the eternal will of God during the temporal life on earth. At the poem's close, Dante is instructed to return to earth to report what he has learned, so that men and society may amend their present course of life and action.

So it is that Dante does not hesitate to criticize the Church on earth for deviating from the holiness of God and for impeding rather than aiding the salvation of man. He places Pope Anastasius in Hell for having agreed to heretical doctrines (Inferno, XI, 8-9), but far more scathing is his denunciation of those clerics who have allowed the spiritual ideal to become corrupted by striving for earthly riches. In the Fourth Circle of Hell he is surprised to see many tonsured heads, and is told:

> Questi fuor cherci, che non han coperchio,
> piloso al capo, e papi e cardinali,
> in cui usa avarizia il suo soperchio.
> (Inferno, VII, 46-48).

As his journey continues he meets more of these "masterpieces of covetousness," who have been led astray by the desire for worldly wealth or power, including Pope Adrian V (Purgatorio, XIX), who reigned for only one month, but was so overcome by worldly ends in this brief period that he

barely escaped the torments of Hell. Even in Heaven the great Saint Peter Damian rages with as much fervor as Wycliffe himself was to do against the corruption of wealth within the Church on earth (Paradiso, XXI, 127-35).

In all these criticisms of a greedy Church, Dante, unlike the Spiritual Franciscans, is not simply extolling poverty for its own sake. Rather, he castigates the Church for grasping at worldly riches and power ". . . because he saw . . . the risk the Papacy ran of losing the substance of spiritual power in grasping at the shadow of the temporal."[5] Like many before and after him, Dante traced the onset of this corruption in the Church to the so-called "Donation of Constantine," whereby the Emperor was reputed to have invested the popes with temporal lands and power (Purgatorio, XXXII, 124-29; 136-47).[6] The lure of gold had thereafter all too quickly displaced concern for matters of the spirit, and in common with many advocates of Church reform, Dante draws a sharp contrast between the humble apostles who had founded the Church on Christ's command, and the prelates of his own day, surrounded by attendants, and conveyed in bejeweled sedan chairs.[7] Such guides could

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[5]Sayers, Comedy, II, 51.

[6]Grandgent/Singleton, pp. 174, 609.

[7]Charles S. Singleton, trans., Dante Alighieri: The Divine Comedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-75), III, pt. 2, 356.

accurately show the broad path to Hell, but not the narrow way to heaven.

The quest for temporal wealth and power often made of the Church a rival of the secular state, and this too was against the will of God. For Dante, Rome was the center of world law and order in both the secular and spiritual realms. The pope as the heir of Peter was to rule the Church, and the emperor as the heir of Caesar was to rule the state. The power of both pope and emperor devolved from Christ, and as Dante said in De Monarchia, the state did not receive its power through the intermediary of the Church. In one of his letters he uses the imagery of Christ as the stem, while the secular and spiritual powers are branches on that single stem.[8] In this position, Dante is the antithesis of the thirteenth century theologian Roger Bacon. As Gilson noted:

> Never has the priestly conception of the world been more clearly or more completely expressed than in the work of this Franciscan, who may be said to be in this matter the archadversary of Dante. The Baconian universe presupposes a dovetailing of the orders, wherein that which we call nature, or natural, finds substance and justification only through being integrated with the supernatural and the religious.[9]

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[8]Dorothy Sayers, "The Divine Poet and the Angelic Doctor," in Further Papers on Dante (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), pp. 44-45.

[9]Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, pp. 205-06.

A similar attitude was also evidenced in the pro-papalist use of the concept of Dominion. Thomas Aquinas had been inclined to grant more independence to the secular order than did Bacon, but Dante goes even further in this regard.[10] As concerns affairs of reason and happiness in this world, secular power has its own proper sphere, in which interference by the Church is but pernicious meddling.[11] This does not mean that Dante advocated control of the Church by the state, for as Gilson states:

> Dante does not for one moment doubt that the noblest of human aims is to enjoy the beatific vision in a blessed eternity, or that the church, whose sole head is the Pope, exists to lead us to it.[12]

To accomplish this aim the Church must be independent of state interference in the spiritual realm, but the Church on its part is not intended by God to be diverted from its proper function by becoming enmeshed in secular affairs. The attempt by the papacy to claim all authority for itself, secular rule being delegated by the pope to such rulers as he chose, might be defended as a means of establishing God's rule on earth, but Dante feared that in the resulting substitution of secular for spiritual concerns, the Church was in danger of losing its spiritual dimension entirely,

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[10]Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, p. 207.

[11]Sayers, Comedy, I, 45.

[12]Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, p. 214.

and so would become merely an earthly institution ignoring its proper function in the "sphere of eternity."[13]

This attitude does much to explain the intense hostility of Dante towards such figures as Pope Boniface VIII, who for him as for others epitomized the defection of the Church from spiritual to temporal goals, goals which not only kept the Church from fulfilling its appointed objectives, but also so separated the Church from its ideal as to make it almost unrecognizable as the earthly representative of Christ. For Dante, Boniface had "prostituted" his spiritual office to the claims of political expediency, and on numerous occasions within the Commedia Boniface is denounced, not only in Hell (to which he is consigned), but also from the very height of the Empyrean.[14] Likewise condemned is Clement V, a successor of Boniface both as pope and as political manipulator (Inferno, XIX; Paradiso, XXX).[15]

For Dante, this "cardinal sin" of the Church in craving temporal wealth and power was directly responsible for other corruptions which obscured the earthly Church's reflection of Christ and the Church Triumphant. He does not deny the right of the Church to resort to force for its own defense, but laments that present popes urge the use of

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[13]Sayers, Comedy, I, 46.

[14]Sayers, Comedy, I, 35. See also Singleton, I, pt. 2, 334-35.

[15]Grandgent/Singleton, pp. 173, 901.

the sword not to rescue the Holy Land from infidels, but rather against their fellow Christians for political gain (Inferno, XXVII; Paradiso, IX, 124-26). Present clerics ignore the teachings of the early fathers, and cite only later decretals which give them "license" to pile up more wealth (Paradiso, IX). Preachers ignore the authority of the Scriptures, twisting the Word of God to their own ends and spinning fables instead of sound doctrine (Paradiso, XXIX, 88-96). Such "hireling shepherds" have so perverted their holy office that the sheep of Christ are "fed on wind, on emptiness" (Paradiso, XXIX, 107). Not content with misdirecting the flock on earth, these false clerics issue so-called "pardons" (for a suitable remuneration) which do not require true penitence. Such pardons are worse than useless, for they encourage men to continue in sin unforgiven (Paradiso, XXIX, 118-26). Even excommunication is used, as by Pope John XXII, not as a harsh but medicinal discipline, but is decreed wholesale against those who can be counted on to pay to have the dread sentence revoked (Paradiso, XVII, 130-36).[16]

Such gross corruption had spread from the higher to the lower clergy. Monks had become prideful and wished to replace their rough robes with raiment of gorgeous scarlet

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[16]See Singleton, III, pt. 2, 313; Sayers, Comedy, III, 223.

(Inferno, XXIII, 60-63).[17] Instead of using the Church's possessions to care for the destitute, they jealously kept all for themselves (Paradiso, XXII, 74-96). Likewise the friars had long since abandoned the way of Francis and Dominic, becoming "gluttonous" devourers of the Church, turning it from its course instead of helping to keep it on the path to God (Paradiso, XI, XII). The mendicant orders were intended to have an exclusively spiritual vocation, and thus to remind the Church of its own exclusively spiritual mission.[18] All these, however, were betraying their own ideal, that of the Church, and ultimately Christ himself, the source of all ideals.

Dante's sad portrait of ecclesiastical perversion may be said to have its artistic culmination in the Pageant of the Church near the end of the Purgatorio. In the Beatrician Masque of Canto XXIX, the Church is displayed as the instrument of salvation founded by Christ, and is typified in the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ's presence on earth.[19] In the Pageant of Canto XXXII, however, the Church on earth has become so corrupted that it has the appearance of the Beast of Revelation 17:3, while the corrupt and venal papacy is portrayed as the harlot who rides upon the

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[17]Sayers, Comedy, II, 329; Singleton, I, pt. 2, 396.

[18]Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, p. 251.

[19]Grandgent/Singleton, pp. 571-72.

Beast (Purgatorio, XXXII, 148-53). So disgusting is this scene, and so far these monsters from the Mystic Rose, that in Paradiso, XXVII, 23-24, Dante is moved to declare the papal seat "vacant in the sight of the Son," vacant not only because of the move of the popes from Rome to Avignon, but vacant also in righteousness and fulfillment of the ideal of God.[20] Wycliffe in the most scathing of his diatribes against the papacy could hardly be more severe.

And yet, for all his censure of the failures of the earthly Church, Dante did not see the relationship between the visible organization and the "True Church" as totally severed. The link between the two was terribly twisted, but it was not broken. Like Augustine, Dante could still give assent to a view of the organizational Church as the representative of Christ, even though in the case of the present Church this function might be obscured by extraneous matters. The very progress of the poem from Hell to Heaven proves that the channels of grace are still open, and Dante leaves no doubt that the institutional Church remains the intended channel through which this grace operates.

It is through the sacraments of the Church that one gains entry to the Kingdom of God; and these rites, which ultimately flow from the incarnation of Christ, proclaim the continuing "indwelling of the mortal by the immortal,

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[20]Sayers, Comedy, II, 329.

of the material by the spiritual, the phenomenal by the real."[21] Those who have not received the sacrament of Baptism, no matter how righteous their lives may have been, are not granted entry into Heaven, but must forever inhabit the Elysian fields of the uppermost level of Hell (Inferno, IV, 34-36). The abode of the heretics, those who in the words of Charles Williams "preferred their own judgment to that of the church,"[22] lies in nether Hell, and their punishment marks the first appearance of fire as a sign of the divine anger (Inferno, IX). Still lower in Hell are placed the schismatics, who in addition to heresy compounded their sin by openly breaking with the hierarchical Church (Inferno, XXVIII). Even Bruno Latini, the friend and confidant of Dante must be assigned to Hell because he had scorned the institutional Church.[23]

Only those who have been reconciled to the hierarchical Church may begin the ascent of Purgatory. It is true that a sincere deathbed repentance may save a man in spite of the Church's excommunication (e.g., Manfred in Purgatorio, III), but his former rebellion against the Church must first be punished by "thirty long years of waiting for

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[21]Sayers, "The Poetry of the Image in Dante and Charles Williams," in Further Papers on Dante, p. 187.

[22]Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), p. 126.

[23]Grandgent/Singleton, pp. 134-35; Sayers, Comedy, I, 166; Singleton, I, pt. 2, 255-58.

every year he spent in his presumption" (Purgatorio, III, 136-41). The only hope for speedier entry to Purgatory is if the Church through the prayers of faithful Christians will have pity on them, but Dante himself, in contrast to his usual practice within Purgatory, allots them no prayer.[24] The Church on earth also claimed the power to speed the progress of the faithful departed through Purgatory by granting them indulgences, and Dante does not question this. He portrays the angelic guardians of the mountain as honoring such indulgences, even those said to be retroactive in their effect (Purgatorio, II), and in spite of the fact that he abhorred the pope who decreed them.[25]

Trajan and Ripheus, the two righteous pagans whom Dante places in Paradise, seem to offer an exception to the statement that the organizational Church is absolutely necessary for salvation. Ripheus, however, after giving "all he had in love" was granted a special grace by God which gave him a vision of "redemption yet to come" (Paradiso, XX, 123). Ripheus believed and hoped in this coming of Christ in the same way as did the Old Testament saints, and, strictly speaking, was a member of the "Church-in-hope" before the advent of Christ. In the case of Trajan the churchly nature of his salvation is even clearer, for it was through the

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[24]Sayers, Comedy, II, 92.

[25]Grandgent/Singleton, p. 333; Singleton, II, pt. 2, 38.

prayers of St. Gregory that his soul was called up from Hell. Gregory baptized Trajan, and so when he returned to the realm of the dead, it was as a faithful member of the sacramental Church, and he was therefore eligible for salvation.[26]

The tension between Dante's respect for the Church, evidenced in the above passages, and his hatred of ecclesiastical corruptions is perhaps most clearly seen in Canto XIX of the Inferno. Here he takes great delight in describing the punishment of simoniacal popes, but incorporates an angry denial of a charge that he himself once wantonly damaged a piece of Church property. He rebukes Boniface VIII for cupidity, and then comes close to apologizing for showing disrespect to the papal dignity.

How, then, do all these presentations of the ideal Church coupled with denunciations of earthly abuse, these curious juxtapositions of love and loathing, fit into the totality of the Commedia as a theological statement and as a work of art? In the first place, during the course of his journey Dante learns to put things in their proper perspective. He never loses his awareness of the numerous defections of the Church on earth from its proper sanctity, but as he climbs nearer to the Empyrean his own vision approaches nearer to that of God himself. He achieves an

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[26]Singleton, III, pt. 2, 334.

increasing awareness of the fact that while the organizational Church has a divine foundation, which is Christ, it also has a human (imperfect) foundation in Peter (cf. the threshold of adamantine of the gate of Purgatory, Purgatorio, IX, 105). If the Church were simply an ideal in the mind of God, it would indeed be perfect in all its aspects—but humanity in need of redemption would have no place in it. In God alone are "Image and Reality one and the same."[27] From his pilgrimage Dante learns the truth to which Gilson alludes in elucidating Augustine's concept of the City of God and the Earthly City:

> Strictly speaking, no earthly community can be identified with one or other of these mystic cities; indeed, it cannot be said that the Church harbours only the elect, or even that it harbours all the elect; yet the Church is the most exact approximation on earth to the city of God, because it is the city of God's intention.[28]

In the Commedia Dante makes a literal and allegorical journey to God, and as Sayers notes,

> . . . the journey to God is the journey into reality. To know all things in God is to know them as they really are, for God is the only absolute and unconditioned Reality, of whose being all contingent realities are at best types and mirrors . . . .[29]

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[27]Sayers, Comedy, I, 68.

[28]Gilson, Dante the Philosopher, p. 203. See also his Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin (Paris: J. Vrin, 1929), Ch. V, II: "La société Chretienne," pp. 220-38.

[29]Sayers, Comedy, III, 16.

Even in Heaven Dante encounters different levels of "reality," i.e., nearness to God, so it should come as no surprise that any institution, even the Church, existing on the battleground of the earth midway between the absolute Reality of God and the absolute Negation of the Devil should partake in some respect of both. Appropriately enough, in Paradise it is the great theologian of the Church Thomas Aquinas who offers Dante help in resolving the perplexity in which the poet finds himself. In creation, the perfect God imparts form to matter, "but Nature fumbles." Christ is perfect, but the rest of creation is not, and thus can reflect the divine perfection "sometimes more and sometimes less" (Paradiso, XIII).

Not only here, but throughout the Commedia the wisdom of Aquinas aids Dante as he strives for spiritual and artistic wholeness, a fact to which the countless long Latin quotations from Thomas' Summa sprinkled through Singleton's voluminous commentaries on the poem bear eloquent witness. One might easily fill a book-length study in tracing specific cases of Dante's debt to Aquinas,[30] and numerous scholars have joined in debate over the poet's adherence or non-adherence to particulars of the Thomistic

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[30]E.g., Philip Wicksted, Dante and Aquinas (New York: J. M. Dent, 1913); F. Ozanam, Dante and Catholic Philosophy, 2nd. ed., trans. Lucia Pychowska (New York: New York Cathedral Library Association, 1913).

system.[31] For the purposes of the present study, however, by far the most important contribution of Aquinas to the Commedia lies in the grand sense of order and unity to which the divergencies and tensions of existence, that of the Church in particular, may be reduced. Gilson and others have most ably shown that the Commedia is not simply "versified Aquinas," but the grand conception and architecture of the Summa undergirds and perhaps makes possible the magnificent structure of the Commedia, in which all things find their proper place and function. From Aquinas, Dante drew not only "substance," but "form" as well:

> It was because he had learned from Aquinas to schematise his arguments that he was able to build the forty-four great circles of Hell and Purgatory and Heaven, and to hold together the threads of his tremendous story and its fourfold allegorical interpretation without omissions, without internal contradictions, and without disproportion.[32]

Into this vast system with which Aquinas, supplemented by other theologians and philosophers, had provided him, Dante was able to incorporate and generally resolve the tensions caused by the deficiencies of the earthly Church. In the hierarchy from absolute Good to absolute Evil, God reigns supreme, and while Dante may join with the saints in waxing as red as Peter himself over the sins of a corrupt Church

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[31]Sayers, "The Divine Poet and the Angelic Doctor," p. 38.

[32]Sayers, "The Divine Poet and the Angelic Doctor," p. 42.

(Paradiso, XXVII), even this corruption is recognized and provided for within the all-pervasive system of God (Inferno, XIX, 106). The defection of individuals, even popes, from the way of God does not render the purposes of God or his channels of grace null and void. The earthly hierarchical Church remains the institution decreed by God as the authoritative means of man's salvation, i.e., his guide to heaven. This realization renders coherent and sincere Dante's denunciation of those who kidnapped Pope Boniface VIII, "And in Christ's Vicar, Christ a captive made" (Purgatorio, XX, 87), although he sharply castigated the sins of Boniface himself. With Bonaventura, Dante is able to say of the wrongs of the Holy See: "I blame not it, but him who there doth fix his cankered sway" (Paradiso, XII, 88-90).[33] The breadth and order of his cosmic conception allows Dante to remain a sweeping Church reformer without becoming an ecclesiastical rebel.

Nor must one forget that it is the Church which gives unity to this cosmic conception within the Commedia. The state exists to provide order, stability, and the general well-being on earth, but only the Church extends into the realms beyond to bind together earth, Purgatory, and Heaven. Even hell, as the distortion of heaven, fits into this

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[33]Sayers' translation. The importance of such a distinction is missed by Alfonso De Salvio in his Dante and Heresy (Boston: Dumas Bookshop, 1936).

unifying function of the Church, for its increasing chaos contrasts directly and powerfully with the increasing unity of the Church as it progresses to the Empyrean. Structurally, Dante's poem cannot function without the concept of the Church.

On the level of personal allegory, in order to progress through the ranks or orders of believers who make up the Church to the vision of God, Dante must deal with his awareness of the failures of "Holy Church" as it exists within an earthly institution, even as he has to deal with the equally perplexing paradoxes of predestination (Paradiso, XXI) and free-will (Purgatorio, IV, XVI). The characters whom Dante meets on his pilgrimage give him good guidance, and here again the Church figures importantly, for it must be remembered that, with the exception of Virgil, who is allowed to accompany him through purgatory, after Dante emerges from the Inferno, all the characters of the poem are members of the Church.

So it is that in incorporating the Church into a crucial role in the Commedia, Dante was likewise incorporating a tension between the Church as it should be and the Church as a sometimes corrupt institution. This was a tension which might easily have torn the poem apart. His ability to deal with this tension without letting it destroy the unity of his work is an artistic achievement of the highest order. By the end of the Paradiso, Dante (and through him

the reader) has managed to approach the attitude of the saints in heaven, which abhors the corruption of the earthly institutional Church in the most vivid terms, but does not allow this indignation to destroy the beatific vision of God, who in spite of his perfect holiness has willed to use a less than perfect institution to bring lost mankind to him.

Dante, both the man and the poet, has not, of course, completely attained the perfection of this "divine perspective"—as a living mortal whose task is to "return" to earth to continue the struggle against evil and corruption, this is neither possible nor appropriate for him. He is not to remain absorbed in mystic contemplation, but is instructed by St. Peter himself to make public the heavenly anger at earthly corruption (Paradiso, XXVII, 64-66). Nevertheless, Dante has been granted a vision of society and eternity both as they are and as God would have them to be. With all its contradictions and paradoxes, the vision remains whole and entire, and finds expression in a work of exquisite poetry and reassuring structure. In the face of temporal defections, Dante is able to look with confidence for the time when the Church will attain ultimate perfection within the eternal presence of God, the ideal source and image of all perfection. In the Commedia one sees how theology and the figure of the Church can be used to give unity and cohesion to a work of imaginative literature, and

how tensions in one's view of the Church can be both present and resolved.

Chaucer

The question of Chaucer's view of the Church and its place in his works could well merit a dissertation-length study on its own. Such an undertaking is obviously beyond the limits of time, space, and human endurance for the purposes of this present study, and so a more restricted objective will have to be adopted. The Church will therefore be considered only as it is treated in the Canterbury Tales, and even here the artistry of Chaucer is so multi-faceted that only a few highlights of the question as a whole can be examined. Even this limited examination, however, should make clearer the crucial role which the Church and churchmen play in the Canterbury Tales, and illustrate further the function which ecclesiology might fulfill in the imaginative literature of the fourteenth century.

In the Canterbury Tales Chaucer obviously devotes a large amount of space to rascally clerics, reflecting in great detail the problem of clerical abuse which caused the fourteenth century ecclesiastical establishment such an "image problem." In this regard, the trio of the Prioress, Monk, and Friar in the General Prologue,[34] who have been

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[34]Citations for the Canterbury Tales are from F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957). References are given in the text by fragment number, group letter, and line number.

seen as depicting progressively worse cases of failure to reflect the ideal of the clerical calling, provide a conspicuous example.[35] That is, Madame Eglentyne (I, A, 118-62) is simply more suited for the life of a courtly lady than for that of the convent, while the Monk (I, A, 165-207) is not only unsuited for the religious life but also does little to keep even the externals of his rule, and the Friar (I, A, 208-69) is revealed as an out and out scoundrel capable of causing public scandal.[36] One may also note among the clerics of dubious piety the Summoner (I, A, 623-68) and the Pardoner (I, A, 669-714) who is a "geldyng" in the spirit if not also in the flesh,[37] both as he is described in the Prologue and as he later within the body of the tales themselves tries to dupe the pilgrims with spurious relics and hypocritical piety (VI, C, 347-453; 904-55). The Pilgrims also encounter a Canon on their journey, who, as he is described by his yeoman (VIII, G, 617-83), has failed to change lead into gold by alchemy, but has nevertheless succeeded in transmuting his heavenly calling into

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[35]Harold Brooks, Chaucer's Pilgrims (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 16.

[36]See esp. Robinson's note, p. 656, on I, A, 212-13, which explains that the marriages the Friar made at his own cost were certainly those of young ladies he himself had seduced.

[37]This imagery is developed by Robert P. Miller in "Chaucer's Pardoner: The Scriptural Eunuch and the Pardoner's Tale," Speculum, 30 (1955), 180-99.

a hell of greed and deceit. In addition to these examples, the reader can doubtless recall other priests, friars, monks, and lesser figures throughout the various tales whose presence combines to cast the institutional Church, at least as it is represented by many of its clergy, into a sad light indeed.

Besides these obvious examples of clerical abuse, however, Chaucer also evidences an awareness of several of the other problems and conflicts which played a part in the fourteenth century ecclesiological crisis of authority. First among these is the controversy among the friars and the other clerics of the Church. As was noted above, a major issue in these disputes was the friars' power of hearing confessions, an office in which they claimed to be superior to the diocesan clergy; while the diocesan clergy for their part saw the ministry of the friars as a threat to their own influence. It is therefore in keeping with the times that Friar Huberd is depicted as being popular with numerous people, "For he hadde power of confessioun, / As seyde hymself, moore than a curat." (I, A, 218-19). Likewise in the tale told by the Summoner, who as an official of the episcopal court may be expected to represent the viewpoint of the diocesan clergy, the reader finds Friar John not only claiming that because of their poverty the friars are closer to God than laymen encumbered by worldly goods (III, D, 1870-72; 1904-28), but also casting aspersions

on the learning of the secular clergy (III, D, 2008-09), and asserting that the ministrations of the friars are superior to those of the other clergy, particularly in the sacrament of penance (III, D, 1816-17). As evidence of Chaucer's acquaintance with the friars' controversy in its other details, one may also note that the vagaries of his friars, e.g., their easy penance, overfamiliarity with women, greed for wealth under the guise of poverty, and their twisting of the Scriptures to their own ends, correspond exactly with those leveled against the friars by anti-fraternal writers such as William de St. Amour, Richard Fitzralph, and Grosseteste.[38] Lest it be thought, however, that Chaucer sides exclusively with the possessioners against the friars, the reader should also remember that his monks and some of his parish priests (e.g., the rich priest who had fathered Symkyn's wife in "The Reeve's Tale," I, A, 3943; 3977-80) are not presented as paragons of virtue either.

Other issues affecting fourteenth century ecclesiology also make an appearance in Chaucer's work. It is possible to see his portrayal of the Friar's and the Pardoner's misuse of the sacrament of penance as his protest against the cheapening, with the resultant controversies, of the

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[38]For details of these similarities, see Arnold Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," Speculum, 28 (1953), 499-513. The wider ecclesiological implications of "The Summoner's Tale" will be explored later in this section.

sacramental channels of grace. In "The Nun's Priest's Tale," following Chauntecleer's and Pertelotes's debate on the reliability of dreams, the narrator intrudes with an explicit reference to the question of predestination, about which ". . . in scole is greet altercacioun . . . and greet disputisoun" (VII, 3237-38). Here he makes reference to Augustine, Boethius, and Bradwardine by name (VII. 3241-42), and likewise mentions the "conditional necessity" which had recently been called into particular prominence by the viewpoints of Ockham and his followers (VII, 3250), though Ockham is not cited by name. The narrator, however, refuses to make a determination in the issue (VII, 3251). Chaucer was likewise certainly aware of at least some of the issues posed by Wycliffe, as the Host's reference to "Lollardry" shows (II, B^1, 1173). That he should have been is hardly surprising, given his own association with John of Gaunt, Wycliffe's protector, and the general furor caused by Wycliffe's ideas.[39]

The various details have thus far done no more than to show an awareness within the Canterbury Tales of several of the disputes which affected fourteenth century ecclesiology. It remains now to explore how the Church functions within Chaucer's work on a level of considerably more artistic

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[39]A more specific comparison of Chaucer and Wycliffe will be given later in this section.

importance than the surface details which are clearly visible for all to see.

Like the Commedia of Dante, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales involves a pilgrimage. The setting, it is true, is quite different, for while Dante covers the forty-four great circles of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, Chaucer is content to amble along on a comfortable palfrey for the few miles from London to Canterbury. Yet, while Chaucer remains quite rooted on the earth (perhaps the Dantean eagle of the Hous of Fame had given him his fill of soaring), there is much to suggest that on the spiritual plane his journey and progress equal that of the Florentine.

This spiritual dimension of Chaucer's pilgrimage has been explored in several modern studies, those of James Baldwin in particular. Baldwin views the Canterbury pilgrimage as something far larger than a simple journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket. For Baldwin "the life and death of the Medieval Christian was framed by creation and Doomsday." Chaucer, moving within this frame, is said to have made the Canterbury pilgrimage representative and symbolic of the pilgrimage of man on earth into eternity. Thus

> . . . the destination of the pilgrims becomes . . . not so much the Canterbury shrine as "The Parson's Tale" because it unfolds the sure wey to Him who is the way, the truth and the light.[40]

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[40]James Baldwin, The Unity of the Canterbury Tales, Anglistica, Vol. 5 (Copenhagen: n.p., 1955), p. 926.

Robert M. Jordan accepts this viewpoint, and brings to its support specific details from the Tales themselves.[41] It will be noted that the piece begins with the figure of Taurus, the sign of early spring, in the sky. When the Parson begins the final tale, however, dusk is fast approaching, and Libra, the sign of the scales and judgment glows in the heavens. Chaucer reinforces the contrast of these two signs by referring to Libra with an astrological term which actually applies to Taurus instead, thus recalling the sign of the poem's beginning.[42] Were the times of morning and evening chance occurrences, and did Chaucer simply make a mistake in his astrology? Or, given the extent of his astrological knowledge in other works, was he here giving the reader a subtle hint as to the true implications of the pilgrimage? Jordan is inclined to believe that the latter is indeed the case, and argues that the Tales therefore have a universal application, with the clerical figure of the Parson taking on a crucial importance as the one who presides over the end of life's journey to the eternal life beyond.

Further support for such a reading of the Tales comes from William W. Lawrence. He stresses the fact that even

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[41]Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 112.

[42]For a discussion of Chaucer's astrological error, see Robinson's note to X, I, 10-11, p. 765.

though the scheme purposed in the "General Prologue" for each pilgrim to tell four tales was not completed, ". . . the tales are, however, definitely finished."[43] Lawrence sees the "Parson's Prologue," "The Parson's Tale," and "Chaucer's Retraction," as bound together and as constituting a definite and intentional pious concluding statement to the Canterbury Tales. According to Lawrence, this group sheds quite a different light on the reading of the rest of the Tales than otherwise might be supposed. Chaucer's Parson does indeed then proceed "To kyntte up al this feeste, and make an ende" (X, I, 47), an ende which allows the Canterbury Tales as a unity "To enden in som vertuous sentence" (X, I, 63).

If these readings have any validity (as they certainly seem to), and the Canterbury Tales may be read not just as a roadside drama but as a pilgrimage of human life to salvation, then the issue of Chaucer's view and use of the Church becomes crucial. This further demands that ecclesiological matters be given careful attention in interpreting the poem. Such a procedure, moreover, is encouraged by specific details of several of the tales themselves.

"The Nun's Priest's Tale," for instance, like the whole of the Canterbury Tales, may be viewed from varying perspectives. Some would see it simply as a good story,

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[43]William W. Lawrence, Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 145.

whose only deeper purpose, if any, is to "poke fun" at those persons who insist that a work of imaginative literature needs a moral purpose to justify its existence.[44] Such a viewpoint may be defended, but the admonition at the end of the tale to see the "moralite," and to take "the fruyt and lat the chaf be still" supported by St. Paul's statement that all that is written is written for our "doctrine" (VII, 3438-43) seems sincere in context, as does the prayer that God may bring us to "his heighe blisse," i.e., salvation in heaven, (VII, 3446).[45]

In addition, within ecclesiastical writings there is a strong tradition which would give several of the characters of the tale a definite churchly connotation. So it is that Mortimer J. Donovan,[46] on the basis of literary and homiletical parallels, interprets the widow as the Church, the cock as the priests who are to awaken the flock, and the fox as a symbol for the Devil or a heretic-tempter. The whole tale is thus read as an allegory of fall and salvation.

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[44] E.g., Stephen Manning, "The Nun's Priest's Morality and the Medieval Attitude Toward Fables," JEGP, 59 (1960), 403-16.

[45] Thus R. T. Lenaghan, "The Nun's Priest's Fable," PMLA, 78 (1963), 300-07, who is mostly concerned with showing the narrator of the tale as a supreme rhetorician and fabulist says that with these lines "the tale has been shifted to a new level . . . from this world to the other world."

[46] "The Moralite of the Nun's Priest's Sermon," JEGP, 52 (1953), 498-508. See esp. pp. 500-01, 508 for the sources on which his interpretation is based.

This basic approach is supported by Charles Dahlberg,[47] who expands Donovan's citations of Latin sources where the fox stands for a "Devil-heretic," but notes as well that in French vernacular literature, especially the Renart-le-nouvel and the "Li Dis d'Entendement" of Jean de Condé, a son of Renard, Rousiel, is presented as a Franciscan who attacks the parish clergy in the person of "Chantecler."[48] Since this fox has the same name as Chaucer's fox (the source of which is hitherto unexplained), and since Condé was prominent at the court of Guillaume de Hainault, whose daughter Philippa subsequently became consort of Edward III of England in whose household Chaucer served, Dahlberg maintains that "The Nun's Priest's Tale" strongly reflects this French tradition.[49] On the basis of this evidence, Dahlberg suggests

> that Chaucer reflects in the story of the cock and the fox, the controversy which took place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries between the secular clergy and the friars.[50]

From this viewpoint, Chaucer sides with the diocesan clergy and their view of hierarchical authority against the friars,

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[47]"Chaucer's Cock and Fox," JEGP, 53 (1954), 277-90.

[48]Dahlberg, pp. 277-78.

[49]Dahlberg, pp. 279-82.

[50]Dahlberg, p. 277.

and calls for the secular clergy to awake and save themselves and the Church from ruin.

These interpretations of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" may not be convincing in all respects and details,[51] but they do provide a strong indication that the Church plays an important role in the tale, especially in view of the spiritual dimension of the Tales as a whole. Considerable differences of interpretation in the specifics of the tale alter the final conclusion surprisingly little. As an example, Arthur T. Broes maintains the identification of the widow with the Church and of Chauntecleer with the secular clergy (specifically the Nun's Priest himself), but whereas Dahlberg sees the main issue to be that of the friars, Broes sees the tale as a disgruntled satire on the Prioress, who is likened in considerable detail to the dominating Pertelote.[52] This appears to be quite a different issue, but in the final analysis the Nun's Priest, on behalf of himself and his kind, is protesting his subordination to others who in the "proper" order of the Church should be under him. The monks and friars enter into this as well, for the poor Nun's Priest is forced to ride a poor nag (VII, 2813) while the Monk is mounted on fine animals (I, A, 168, 206) and the Friar is richly dressed (I, A,

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[51] See Robinson, p. 751.

[52] "Chaucer's Disgruntled Cleric: The Nun's Priest's Tale," PMLA, 78 (1963), 156-62.

261-63).[53] In all these cases, the Nun's Priest, as a secular cleric, is seen to protest the ascendancy of the regulars, and in fantasy at least to call for his superior role like the witty cock of his tale.

I may offer another related reading of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" as well. Although many sources indicate a clerical identification of Chauntecleer, some elements of his portrait point more towards the nobility. His comb is "batailled as it were a castel wal" (VII, 2860), and when he descends from his perch he has the demeanor "as it were a grym leoun" (VII, 3179), and is as "roial, as a prince is in his halle" (VII, 3184). Likewise, in the French vernacular literature which gives support for a clerical identification of Chauntecleer, other possibilities also exist. In the "Li Dis de Trois Estas du Monde" of Jean de Condé the cock is made to represent the ideal manifestation of each of the three estates in turn, so that a knightly identification of the cock is possible.[54] It is perhaps, then, significant that the narrator's moral exhortation which interrupts the story when Chauntecleer is seized by the fox is addressed not to the clergy, but to the noble estate:

> Allas! ye lordes, many a fals flatour
> Is in youre courtes, and many a losengeour,

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[53] Broes, p. 156.

[54] Dahlberg (p. 182) notes this work, but argues that the clerical role is the "most traditional."

> That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,
> Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith,
> Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye;
> Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye. (VII, 3325-30).

Such an admonition may indeed refer to flattery in general, but it should be recalled that the nobility were particularly susceptible to Wycliffite propaganda, and that Bishop Brinton had warned that the nobility were being told what they wanted to hear by Wycliffe, but were being led astray so that the Church was in danger of being despoiled. It is to be noted that although Bishop Brinton addresses his remarks directly to the clergy, he specifically warns of the "subtiles locutores," i.e., Wycliffites, who have captured the loyalty of the secular powers with promises of Church reform. He charges that the Wycliffites have actually turned these powers into betrayers of the Church, which now stands defenseless against irresponsible attacks of all kinds.[55] In this light, the widow's barnyard might be the Church, Chauntecleer the nobility, and the Fox the Devil-heretic Wycliffe. It is possible then, that "The Nun's Priest's Tale" is an anti-Wycliffite piece in defense of the traditional hierarchical Church, expressed in fabular form so as to be less offensive to Chaucer's noble protectors who were being led astray.

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[55]See above, p. 103. See esp. Brinton, Sermons, II, 458-62.

The case for the ecclesiological significance of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" would, of course, be strengthened if any one of the above specific interpretations were so obvious as to be unarguable. Objections may naturally be raised to any one, though future research may help to clarify the issue. There certainly is, however, a considerable body of evidence which suggests that Chaucer's tale of the cock and the fox has to do not with a barnyard, but with the Church, and that however one may choose to interpret the specific details, the tale champions the traditional Church and its diocesan clergy against the sly attacks of those who would work them harm.

Whatever doubts may remain concerning "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the constitution and order of the Church have been persuasively shown to be major issues in "The Summoner's Tale." Scholars have long recognized that this story, with its masterfully drawn character of the wily and corrupt friar, is a superb fictional creation which incorporates within a few lines the major charges which had been leveled against the friars since the time of William of St. Amour.[56] Building on previous scholarship, John V. Fleming in particular has emphasized that far from being an attack on a particular friar or friary as some critics had stated,

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[56]Arnold Williams, pp. 499-513; D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 249.

the tale is an eloquent portrayal of the whole fraternal dispute which so troubled the fourteenth century Church.[57] Fleming provides a convincing analysis of the friar in the tale as personifying in his every word and deed the accusations regarding false, twisted scholarship, manipulation of the confessional, and malicious "prying into houses" (both literal domiciles and the spiritual house of the soul) which summarized the fraternal disputes. In short, the "Summoner's Tale" is certainly a gem of anti-fraternal literature, but there are strong additional indications that at the core of the tale lie related elements which bear even more directly on crucial questions of ecclesiology.

The conclusion of the "Summoner's Tale" may be seen as simply a fitting punishment to the rascally friar, but it is certainly more than that. As Alan Levitan argues:

> From the point at which Thomas bestows his gift upon Friar John, to the proposed solution of its division by Jankyn, what appears as a merely ribald anecdote is, in fact, a brilliant and satirical reversal of the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.[58]

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[57] John V. Fleming, "The Anti-fraternalism of the Summoner's Tale," JEGP, 65 (1966), 688-700. For an example of an attempt at a more restricted interpretation, see J. S. P. Tatlock, "Notes on Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales," MLN, 29 (1914), 143.

[58] "The Parody of Pentecost in Chaucer's Summoner's Tale," University of Toronto Quarterly, 40 (1970-71), 236-46. The quotation is from p. 236. See also Bernard Levy, "Biblical Parody in The Summoner's Tale," Tennesse Studies in Literature, 11 (1966), 45-60.

In support of this contention Professor Levitan notes certain parallels between the friar of the tale and the Joachist friars who claimed that they alone were the true Church, having a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit and the "Eternal Gospel."[59] He finds further support for this parallel in the Roman de la Rose, where the Joachists are termed "stinking prophets" (which the tale's friar literally becomes), and where the name "John" (the same as the Summoner's friar) is used as a symbol for the Joachists.[60] The importance of this is that Chaucer is presenting these friars not as the true Church with a new gift of the Spirit, but as exactly the opposite, as a church of Anti-Christ, blessed only by a foul wind. This accounts for Thomas' pungent gift to the friar, and the subsequent solution of a cartwheel as a means of dividing the "gift" has its origin in the common iconographic portrayal of Pentecost where the Apostles are pictured in a circle or gathered at a round table with the fire of the Spirit descending on them in rays resembling the spokes of a wheel.[61] As Levitan concludes:

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[59]Levitan, pp. 237-38.

[60]See the third part of the Chaucerian Romaunt of the Rose, ll. 7093-7103, 7178-82. These lines are most probably not by Chaucer, of course, but Levitan argues that Chaucer knew the entire Roman. See Levitan, p. 237.

[61]Levitan's pictures of Medieval illustrations of Pentecost are particularly convincing, esp. illus. 5, 6, 7. He also notes (pp. 241-42) that in Dante's Commedia, Paradiso X-XII the friars in heaven are placed on great wheels, of which the cartwheel is a fitting parody.

> The three-way interplay of friars, Pentecost, and wheels provides a witty conclusion to the Summoner's Tale and at the same time clarifies the fundamental irony of Chaucer's fable. For the summoner who tells the tale, Jankyn's jest is probably nothing more than a surface-ribaldry; for the poet behind the fictional teller, the proposal contains a highly sophisticated and formally perfect thrust at the inversion of the Holy Spirit among the corrupt friars.[62]

In a recent article Penn Szittya has noted several additional details which strengthen the premise that "The Summoner's Tale" is a pentecostal parody directed at the friars,[63] though he questions the necessity of the Joachistic identity of the friar, especially since the General Chapter of the Franciscans met at Pentecost every three years, thus providing a more than sufficient link of the friars with that festival.[64] Most importantly, however, Szittya isolates the central issue which renders this tale of crucial importance in the field of ecclesiology. Noting the friars' contention that they mirrored most closely the

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[62]Levitan, p. 244.

[63]"The Friar as Fake Apostle: Antifraternal Exegesis and the Summoner's Tale," SP, 71 (1974), 19-46. These details include the fact that Cyprian's widely quoted translation of the Pentecost story in Acts, uses the word flatus, which easily suggests a Goliardic parody; the Pentecost hymn which refers to the Apostles "viscera afflata Sancto Spiritu;" the "sweet-smelling" offerings of the Old Testament Pentecost; the digression on Moses (III, D, 1885-93), whose Sinai experience was a "pre-figuring" of Pentecost; and the friar's speechlessness (III, D, 2168).

[64]Szittya, p. 28.

state of the first Apostles and that they therefore were superior to the rest of the Church, he observes:

> These tendencies were not taken lightly by their chief critics, who also happened to be those who traditionally claimed to have received the mantle of authority from the apostles, namely, the bishops and especially the parish clergy. After all, it was the transmitted sanction of the apostolate, passed on from generation to generation in the Church from the time of Christ, that lay at the theological heart of their claim to any spiritual authority over their flock.[65]

"The Summoner's Tale" therefore emerges as an eloquent and detailed defense of the traditional Church of the diocesan clergy against the pretensions of the friars.[66] It thus stands as an important document directly related to the fourteenth century Church's crisis of authority.

Others of The Canterbury Tales, e.g., those of the Man of Law and the Pardoner, appear to have a possible ecclesiological dimension, and further research may aid in defining this more exactly. What has been seen in "The Nun's Priest's Tale" and in "The Summoner's Tale," however, indicates that the question of the Church was a major one in the internal as well as the overall structure of Chaucer's work. However one may interpret the details of the story of the cock and the fox, it evidences an awareness of the issues confronting the fourteenth century Church, stems from a line of

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[65]Szittya, p. 34.

[66]Szittya, p. 35. See also Fleming, p. 700 for a similar view.

ecclesiastical associations, and adopts a conservative viewpoint. Certainly "The Summoner's Tale" raises issues of divine authority in the Church, and favors the viewpoint of the secular clergy. This leads once again to the issue of the place of the Church in the Tales as a whole, and to the question of how the true Church is portrayed in Chaucer's work.

In a real sense, all of the pilgrims who undertake the journey to Canterbury may be seen as the Church. Like the institutional Church, this group is a mixed body containing some saints and not a few scoundrels. All the estates are represented, and the Knight, the Parson, and the Plowman may be seen as portraying the ideal realization of their respective places in society.[67] That is, the warrior Knight, participant in numerous crusades, is a protector of the Church; the Parson is a godly and loving cleric; and the Plowman is a hard-working laborer who feeds the other estates and practices Christian charity in his proper station. Within the Canterbury Tales as a whole, however, the clerics are singled out for a large share of attention, and this probably is not accidental, since this estate was charged particularly with leading the Church on earth on its spiritual pilgrimage.

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[67]For an examination of Chaucer's relation to estate literature see Jill Mann, Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

In the personages of all his clerics Chaucer has presented quite a comprehensive picture of his view of the ideal and the failures of the hierarchical Church. It is true that his Canterbury pilgrims include no popes or bishops, but princes of the Church could hardly be expected on such a "middle-class excursion." He does, however, provide representatives of these exalted ecclesiastical persons. Just as the Knight may be seen as representing the secular power, standing in as it were, for the king and higher nobility, the Pardoner comes from the pope, and the Summoner is an official of the episcopal court. Their greed and corruption may be taken as reflecting back upon their superiors. In a similar way, the individual priests, nuns, monks, friars, canons, and theologians are representatives of their peers. In his own way, then, Chaucer's mirror of the Church and its leaders is as complete as the far more elaborate monument of Dante.

Amongst all these personages, however, it is the Parson who best fulfills the ideal of the clergy. The Clerk, of course, is a likeable figure of proper scholarship, but is so immersed in his books that beyond praying for his benefactors he has little desire to become involved directly with the cure of souls (I, A, 285-308). The Parson, however, as he is described in the "General Prologue" (I, A, 477-528) is not without education, but is totally involved in caring for the souls of his flock, and is keenly aware

that he must be a shining example to his people in order to lead them to heaven. Within the body of the Tales the Parson confirms the good impression of the "Prologue." He resists the temptation to reply in kind to the insults which his admonition to the Host against swearing have brought upon him (II, B, 1163-90). Furthermore, when the Parson finally does tell his tale, he does not use it as many other Pilgrims had done to ridicule his detractor, but simply proceeds to preach on a worthy matter, delivering a sermon on penance and the Seven Deadly Sins as a help to the pilgrims in treading the way to salvation.

"The Parson's Tale" itself is admittedly to modern tastes an extremely dull compilation, but it does provide an extremely orthodox exposition of the sure means to salvation.[68] It is not necessary to see the Canterbury Tales as being unified by the correspondence of the various pilgrims to each of the Deadly sins,[69] but it is nonetheless true that the remedy of penance applies to the faults of any and all, according to the traditional teaching of the Church. Here at the end of the Tales the Parson functions as the

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[68]The assertion by H. Simon, "Chaucer a Wyclifite," Chaucer Society Essays, Part III (1876) that the Tale is a Wycliffite work to which numerous orthodox interpolations were added in the fifteenth century is preposterous and generally discredited. See Robinson, pp. 765-66.

[69]This theory is propounded by Frederick Tupper, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA, 29 (1914), 93-128. It is refuted by John L. Lowes, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA, 30 (1915), 237-371.

pastor of the pilgrimage, and it is he, not the burly Miller with his bagpipe, who is in the fore as the pilgrims near their final destination. In the Parson, then, Chaucer provides an embodiment of the clerical ideal presented not as an abstraction, but as flesh and blood, fulfilling the task of spiritual guide to which he has been called.

Like Dante, Chaucer clearly recognizes that not all members of the Church, not even the clergy, live up to their calling. As this tension exists in life, so Chaucer the artist incorporates it into his mirror of life, and so forcefully does he do so that for many readers the numerous rascally embodiments of the organizational Church seem to overwhelm the Parson and his ideal. Such a concentration on the unfavorable aspects of Chaucer's representatives of the Church enabled the early Anglican reformers to claim the poet as an ally and fellow-rebel against the Church of the Middle Ages.[70] It is quite true that Chaucer points up numerous abuses in the Catholic Church, but so had countless saints, theologians, and secular writers before him. If he is compared with a truly radical reformer such as Wycliffe, however, a more balanced reading of Chaucer's ecclesiology

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[70]Thomas Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer (1892; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), II, 461-64. For more modern Wycliffite views of Chaucer, see J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer and Wyclif," MP, 14 (1916-17), 257-68, and Roger Loomis, "Was Chaucer a Laodicean?," in Essays and Studies in Honor of Carlton Brown (1940; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), pp. 129-48.

results. Wycliffe in effect broke with the hierarchical Church, openly attacked its cornerstones of doctrine and authority such as the papacy and the sacraments, replaced the hierarchical Church with the intangible Church of the predestinate, and developed the concept of Dominion to enable the state to "correct" the organizational Church by force if necessary. Where does Chaucer ever adopt such positions? They are, in fact, conspicuously absent from his works. Yet it was these doctrinal principles, not censure of clerics, which constituted the heart of Wycliffism and which in the eyes of his critics threatened the total collapse of medieval society. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 gave substance to such charges, and showed the dangers of a system which tended to remove secular or religious ideals from a traditional context.[71] One has only to imagine Geoffrey Chaucer as a wild-eyed follower of Wat Tyler or John Ball to see the absurdity of such a reading of his work.

What Chaucer presents in the Canterbury Tales, however, is something quite different. In the analysis above of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" and "The Summoner's Tale" it was seen that Chaucer takes the side of the traditional parish priests against the newer exclusivistic elements of the clergy. Accordingly, it is more than fitting that at the

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[71]For an explicit correlation of these factors see Brinton, Sermons, II, 385-91.

end of the Tales, his pilgrims of the Church are taught and guided by the godly Parson, the worthy representative of the hierarchical Church from time immemorial. Neither should one assume that it is by accident that the Parson takes as his sermon text the passage from Jeremiah 6:

> State super vias et videte, et interogate de viis antiquis que sit via bona, et ambulate in ea; et inuenietis refrigerium animabus vestris. . . .

Faced with open and admitted failures of the organizational Church, and very much aware of issues which placed the Church in a crisis of authority, it is not to new conceptions of the Church that the pilgrims are directed, but to the "old ways," i.e., to the faith of their fathers under the leadership of godly clergy, to find rest and solace for their souls. Much more eloquently than most men, Chaucer decried abuses in the institutional Church, but here at the end of the Tales, as throughout their development, his call for reform is for an inner transformation of life within the traditional framework of the Church and its sacraments. Reformation is surely needed, but his is the reformation of a conservative who wishes to see the good "old ways" revived, not that of an iconoclast. It is therefore most significant that at journey's end the pilgrims of all estates, good and bad alike, are guided by the holy Parson, who prays for grace

> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial. (X, I, 49-51).

This, not an earthly shrine, is the ultimate goal of Chaucer's pilgrimage, and the traditional Church, fulfilling its proper function in the figure of the godly Parson, is his response to the issues and failures which challenged the authority of that Church in the fourteenth century.

Gower

It is likely that few people in the twentieth century care what, if anything, John Gower had to say about the Church, or how ecclesiology functions within the lengthy tri-lingual corpus of his works. Even among medievalists, Gower's reputation pales beside such eternal giants as Dante and Chaucer. In spite of this, he was certainly counted among the major authors by the critical opinion of his time, and for more than a century after his death his various works were not only copied, but also widely read.[72] After a long period of neglect, Gower in recent years has once again begun to receive some share of scholarly attention, with his polished and consistent style and his "story-

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[72]For an account of the changing fortunes of Gower's literary reputation see W. P. Ker, Essays on Medieval Literature (London: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 101-02; John H. Fisher, John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 1-36.

teller's gift" receiving particular, though hardly enthusiastic, praise.[73] It is also true that Gower's voluminous productions, touching as they do on so many aspects of life and thought, provide a veritable quarry of source material for those who are concerned with discovering issues which were considered important by persons of the fourteenth century, and by those who are engaged in elucidating common opinions about these issues as they are mirrored in the literature of the time.[74]

For the purposes of the present study, since after all it is with "Moral Gower" that it has to do, it may be expected that there is much about the Church in his productions, and this expectation is not disappointed. Throughout his various works, Gower evidences a great deal of concern for the Church, its nature, and proper ordering; and, indeed, develops this concern into quite a major theme for his literary endeavors. Reference to the Church occurs in the Mirour de l'Omme and the Confessio Amantis, most obviously in the former, but also in the confessional frame, stories such as Constantine and Sylvester, and mention of the great Schism in Book V in the latter. Recent studies have tended to stress the "single-mindedness" of Gower and

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[73]Derek Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate, Writers and their Work, No. 211 (London: Longman's, Green, 1969), p. 6.

[74]Ker, p. 101; Fisher, p. v.

to emphasize the "similarity in method, structure, and content of his major pieces."[75] As one author remarks ". . . it sometimes seems that Gower had only one poem to write, but had to write it in three languages . . .",[76] and one scholar has gone so far as to read the Confessio Amantis as an involved allegory progressing from imperfect finite words to the perfect Divine Logos, Jesus Christ.[77]

Accordingly, an examination of the entire Gower corpus might seem to be in order to establish Gower's use of ecclesiology, but for several reasons the following pages will deal primarily with the Vox Clamantis.[78] Limited space provides one good reason for such an approach, especially since the ideas contained in it are not greatly modified elsewhere in the "unity" of Gower's writings. In addition, the Vox was presumably addressed especially to the clergy, and the Church receives particular attention

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[75]Fisher, p. 135.

[76]Pearsall, p. 13.

[77]Patrick J. Gallacher, Love, the Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower's Confessio Amantis (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975).

[78]The standard edition of Gower remains that of G. C. Macauley, The Complete Works of John Gower, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899-1902). Quotations from the Vox Clamantis and other Latin Works of Gower are from Vol. IV of this source, and will be given in the text. The English translation of the Latin lines, also given in the text, is from Eric W. Stockton, The Major Latin Works of John Gower (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

here.[79] The title of this work, with its evocation of John the Baptist, suggests a prophetic role for the author, and within it there is a conscious linking to that other John who produced the Apocalypse,[80] both of which facts promise a more searching treatment of ecclesiological matters than in a "mirror" or a confession of love. For all these reasons, the Vox Clamantis will be taken as a primary text, with allusions being made to Gower's other works where appropriate.

As regards genre, the Vox forms a part of the medieval "estates literature" which dealt with the constitution, responsibilities, and failures of the various classes of society.[81] Within this basic form Gower incorporates various elements from the "penitential tradition," popular sermons, and the literature of complaint to construct a coherent view of human society and its interrelated strengths and weaknesses.[82] In the Vox, as elsewhere throughout Gower's writings,[83] human society is seen as an order comprising the three "estates" of knights, clergy,

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[79]Fisher, pp. 156-57.

[80]Pearsall, p. 8.

[81]For a survey of this body of literature, see Jill Mann's Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire, cited above p. 147.

[82]Fisher, pp. 137-54 provides a helpful discussion of these various "streams" of medieval literature in Gower.

[83]See Pearsall, p. 11.

and laborers. In common with many (perhaps the majority) of writers in his time, however, Gower reports that the world, which should be an orderly and graduated society, is in a horrible muddle.

For Gower, the Peasants' revolt of 1381, which threatened the very framework of society, was the terrifying result of the ills of the present age. This uprising stands for him as a sort of symbol of the dissolution of morals and restraint which were rampant in the world. Far more than a passing outburst of wild-eyed radicals among the lowest ranks, this revolt ". . . had provided Gower and his England with a foretaste of the Apocalypse,"[84] and as such had implications of cosmic proportion. In the first book of the Vox, Gower presents a picture of this great uprising which stands as one of the most memorable and readable passages in the totality of his works. This account, while it is often read in isolation, is not a versified chronicle but stands as a prelude to what is to come in the rest of the poem. As Fisher notes:

> The first book of the Vox Clamantis is not history, but a poet-philosopher's meditation on the meaning of history. That meaning is clearly that when order is not maintained, chaos ensues.[85]

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[84]Pearsall, p. 9.

[85]Fisher, p. 173.

That is, Gower feels that the blame for such a terrible outburst must be placed upon the failure of the various estates to fulfill their proper responsibilities in society, and from this introduction he goes on to inquire about the reasons and shortcomings which could bring such a tragedy to pass.[86] All the estates receive their share of blame, and the poem considers the failings of each in turn. It is the Church, however, which receives the most attention, and Books III and IV are devoted entirely to ecclesiastical affairs.

In the course of his lengthy treatment of the Church Gower presents a detailed catalogue of clerical abuses stretching from the pope and curia down to the parish priests and wandering mendicants. At the outset (III. 11-40) the wealth, ambition, and pride of modern clerics is sharply contrasted to the poverty, love, and humility of Christ Himself. Like many before and after him, Gower laments the supposed Donation of Constantine, which endowed the Church with temporal wealth and authority (III. 283 ff.). Having tasted earthly riches, the Church has been led to neglect the riches of the spirit. The "sword" of temporal power has been given into the hands of the clergy, and for the most part, the clergy has found this more to its liking

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[86]Critical opinion agrees that the Peasants' Revolt passage was actually added after the rest of the Vox was written, but as the poem stands in final form, these lines function in the manner outlined above.

than to wield the "spiritual" sword (III. 635 ff.). Like Dante, Gower sees this as a hindrance to the Church's proper function: just as a knight should not offer sacrifice at the altar, neither should a priest wage war (III. 389-90). Instead of using its wealth to convert pagans, the present Church prefers to engage in wars against fellow Christians (III. 671 ff.). Such concern with worldly matters affects not only the popes, but has invaded the courts of ecclesiastical justice, specifically the curia (III. 1220 ff.).[87] Not only may these high judges be bribed, but ingenious and avaricious clerics have found ways to invent "new sins" to be remitted for a profit:

> Nunc, set, que Moysi neque lex prohibit neque Cristi,
> Plurima decretis dant prohibenda nouis
> Set michi que statuunt hodie peccata, remittunt
> Cras, sibi si dedero . . . . (III. 231-34)
>
> (But now with their new decrees they declare a great many things prohibited which the law of neither Christ nor of Moses prohibits. But if I were to pay out to them, they would pardon tomorrow what they pronounce sin today, p. 122).

Here Gower denounces the Church's use of the distinction between the "natural Law" (God's immutable decrees) and the "positive law" (decisions made by the Church on other matters).[88] Too often such "positive laws" are decreed not

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[87]See also Mirour de l'Omme, 18457, 20140.

[88]Fisher, p. 160. See also Mirour de l'Omme, 18451 and Confessio Amantis, Prologue, 247.

for the good of souls, but for clerical profit. The result is that the pope, who should be the head of the Church, now functions more like its tail (III. 787).

The bishops, unfortunately, fall victim to similar vices (e.g., III. 1671-72), and so do the canons (IV. 350 ff). Likewise the lesser clergy, parish priests, and curates neglect the cure of souls for lucrative posts in the courts (III. 1350 ff.), and even those priests who consent to reside within the bounds of their parishes prefer to hunt hares and foxes rather than the souls of men (III. 1511 ff.). Christian values are turned upside down, for while helpless beggars are allowed to starve, the parson feeds his hunting dogs on choice provisions (III. 1501 ff.). Gower wonders how such priests can be expected to guide the souls of others when their own are so grossly neglected (III. 1647 ff.), and the poet must sorrowfully lament that "Talibus et Cristi lex perit ipsa quasi" (III. 1620), i.e., ". . . Christ's law almost perishes because of such men" (p. 152).

In Book IV of the Vox, Gower turns his attention to the clergy regular, unfortunately finding the situation among these clerics all too similar to that of the seculars. Too many monks have withdrawn from the world in name and dress only—their thoughts are still on earthly comforts, and their stomachs are full of the choicest food and wine (IV. 51-60). For some, the taste for worldly pleasure has

grown to such an extent that the cloister cannot contain them. Gower cites against these vagantes the comparison of a monk out of his cloister to a fish out of water (IV. 281-90), employing the same imagery, but perhaps not the same wit, familiar to readers of Chaucer.[89] Likewise the nuns and other female religious fail to observe the ideals of their order (IV. 547 ff.), though Gower is prepared to find some excuse for this in the natural "frailty" of their sex (IV. 561), and part of their guilt must be borne by their male "ordinaries" who force physical rather than spiritual attention upon their charges (IV. 595 ff.).

In the final portions of Book IV of the Vox, Gower focuses his attention upon the friars. Once again we encounter the charges against the mendicant orders made familiar by William of St. Amour, Fitzralph, and others in the anti-fraternal tradition. The present friars have abandoned the holy ideals of SS. Francis and Dominic (IV. 690-710). The friars have multiplied in unchecked numbers throughout the Church, but have managed to get their rules changed to allow them to serve their own selfish ends instead of the body of the faithful (IV. 724 ff.). They care not for the living, but seek only to bury the dead for the money this traffic will bring them (IV. 731 ff.). If the friars are concerned with the living, it is only for

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[89] Canterbury Tales, I, A, 179-81; Robinson, p. 19.

positions of wealth and influence (IV. 781 ff., 810 ff.), or perhaps to seduce wives under the guise of piety (IV. 831 ff.). In short, the friars talk much of the holy life, but their own actions are far from holy (IV. 751 ff.), and their so-called ministrations cause much disorder and confusion among the hierarchy and faithful of the Church (IV. 891 ff.).

From the above citations and many similar elements in the Vox it can be seen that Gower takes a rather dismal view of the Church in his day. Combining elements from the various streams of ecclesiastical literature, he produces a picture of the Church which some have felt to be "unrelieved" in its pessimism.[90] Indeed, many of his strictures against the ecclesiastical establishment, his criticism of the curia, monks, and especially the friars, have been compared to those of Wycliffe.[91]

Taking all things as a whole, however, the Gower who emerges from the Vox (and also his other works) reveals himself to be far from a radical reformer or rebel against constituted authority. This does not mean that he is insincere in his denunciations of abuses in Church and state, but he certainly never rejects the institutional medieval Church in anything like the manner of later (and

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[90]Fisher, pp. 142-43. See also Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 230.

[91]Stockton, p. 24.

some contemporary) reformers. In the genre in which he is working, that of complaint concerning the estates, it is obvious that wrongs and abuses will receive the largest share of attention. It does not follow from this, however, that one should leap to the conclusion that Gower has turned his back on the Church as a totally corrupt and hopeless aberration.

In the first place, Gower dedicates the Vox to Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, whom he characterizes as a blameless cleric (Dedicatory Epistle, 35 ff.), and to whom he looks for relief of his own and society's sorrows (Dedicatory Epistle, 9-10, 27-29). Within the opening book of the poem as well, reporting the outrages of the Peasants' Revolt, we find that

> The murder of the archbishop [Sudbury] is the culminating horror of the lawless frenzy, because the archbishop is the symbol not only of the love and peace which should characterize an orderly society (V.C., I. 1010), but also of order and authority: "Qui pater est anime, viduatur corporis expers . . . . Qui fuerat doctor legum, sine lege peribat."[92]

The Church, whatever the defections of individual clerics, remains a part of the universal order, and it was for the fuller realization of this order that Gower was striving.[93] Everywhere, Gower is careful to state that it is the

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[92]Fisher, p. 10.

[93]Fisher, p. 170.

unworthy members of institutions, not the institutions themselves that he abhors. An example of this may be found in the headnote to the first chapter of Book IV of the Vox, where, after saying that he is about to discuss the "waywardness" of the monks, he is nevertheless "ordinis vero illorum sanctitatem commendans," rebuking only those who transgress that sanctity. Again, after his long diatribe against the friars, Gower, unlike Wycliffe, is able to say:

> Non peto quod periant, set fracti consolidentur,
> Et subeant primum quem dedit ordo statum. (IV. 807-08)
>
> (I do not ask that they be destroyed, but that the weak be strengthened, and that they submit to the original way of life which their order imposed. p. 184).

However much many of Gower's criticisms of the Church may resemble those of Wycliffe, Gower explicitly repudiates Wycliffism itself, and he wrote one of his later works, the Carmen Super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia[94] specifically "Against the Devil in the cause of Lollardy."[95] There seems little doubt that the Lollards are likewise the target in the Vox of the lines:

> Indiscreta tamen sunt qui documenta parantes
> Scismatis in plebem magna pericla mouent. (III. 1129-30)
>
> (There are, however, those who are bringing the great dangers of schism upon the people by getting out rash documents. p. 141).

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[94]Macauley, IV, 346-54.

[95]Stockton, p. 34.

Likewise, though Wycliffe is not mentioned by name, it is clear that it is to the Oxford rebel that Gower refers as the new "Arius" and the new "Jovinian" (IV. 1227-28, VI. 1267).[96]

Such assumptions are given added support by the fact that Gower repudiates two of the cardinal points of Wycliffism: its views on transubstantiation and the theory of Dominion. He takes care to affirm the orthodox view that the consecrated bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, "Hoc verus sanguinis vna fit atque caro" (III. 1820). As regards dominion, in spite of a sentence which intimates that bishops may lose their powers by putting them up for hire (III. 1671-72), Gower does not go on to the radical conclusions of the Wycliffites.[97] While he does say that in the early Church all goods were held in common, the most he can say now is that the Church should use its wealth not for selfish ends but for the furtherance of God's Kingdom (III. 985 ff.). Furthermore, while it is obvious to Gower that the tree of the Church could use some pruning among certain of its wild shoots, it is clear that it is to the Church authorities and not to the secular lords that he looks for this surgery (III. 1831-32). In all this, Gower obviously looks for a cleansing of the Church, but the

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[96]Stockton, p. 25.

[97]Stockton, p. 25.

faith and Church he envisions is the traditional Church of old, not a visionary Church of the future. As he says in the Carmen: "Quod docet ecclesia tutantum crede, nec vltra / Quam tibi scire datur quomodocumque stude." (ll. 78-79).

Nonetheless, the abuses which he has noted in the Church do make problems for Gower, as do the disputes which rocked it in his day. The Great Papal Schism especially was a cause for alarm, and Gower treats it in several places in his works.[98] Indeed, he alleges that the schism was one of the disturbing factors which moved him to compose the Vox. He says to Archbishop Arundel:

> Curia diuisa que Rome stat modo visa,
> Dum se peruertit, in luctum gaudia vertit:
> Et quia lex Cristi dolet isto tempore tristi,
> Hoc ad plagendum librum tibi mitto legendum.
> (Dedicatory Epistle, 5-8)
>
> (As long as the Court of Rome destroys itself, which at present is seen to be divided, joy turns into sorrow. And since Christ's law suffers because of this grievous age, I am sending you this book to read as a lament. p. 47).

One should note, however, that whereas the Schism was one of the factors which led a disillusioned Wycliffe to call for the abolition of the papacy, Gower wishes only for peace to be restored to the Church and for the true pope to be recognized by all. Neither, like many other pious souls

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[98]See, e.g., Mirour de l'Omme, 18829 ff.; In Praise of Peace, ll. 230 and 254 ff. (Macauley, III. 488-89); De Lucis Scrutino (Macauley, IV. 355-57).

in his age, does Gower have any doubts concerning the identity of this true pope:

> Scisma patens hodie monstrat quod duo pope,
> Vnus scismaticus, alter et ille bonus:
> Francia scismaticum colit et statuit venerandum,
> Anglia set rectam seruat vbique fidem. (III. 3-6)
>
> (The schism evident today shows that there are two popes, one a schismatic and the other the proper one. France favors the schismatic and declares that he ought to be revered, but England everywhere preserves the right faith. p. 116).

While the "true" pope may not be blameless in all respects, it is the "anti-pope" Clement that Gower chiefly blames for the strife which divides the Church and which leads even to the shedding of Christian blood (III. 955-57).

In view of the role that the conciliar movement was later to play in ending this Great Schism, it is interesting to find Gower adopting a view of the nature of the Church which parallels the foundation upon which the conciliarists based their position. That is, both Gower and the conciliarists see the Church on earth as a <u>congregatio fidelium</u> (III. 1023 ff.) which is properly led by the hierarchy. All faithful Christians, however, are just as much a part of the Church as the pope and cardinals, and in time of crisis this voice of the faithful has every right to be raised in seeking a solution to the Church's dilemma, including the right ordering of the clergy and hierarchy

(III. 1675 ff.)[99] It was not until after the time of Gower that the idea that this voice should be exercised through a general council gained wide popularity, and Gower does not specifically appeal to such a body. The basis for it is there, however. In addition, when a solution to the schism was finally reached, it was in large part made possible by the support of the temporal lords, and Gower is already calling on Christian sovereigns to use their energy and influence for effecting a reunion of Christendom (III. 27-32). As Gower expresses this plea, it is clear that he is not advocating a radical Wycliffite lay-enforced solution or domination of the Church. Rather, in a very similar way to what was later actually to happen, he was urging the secular lords, as part of Christian society, to work with the ecclesiastical powers for the end to a tragedy which affected all classes. Gower's aim is clearly to unify and restore, not to alter radically the Church, and his final call at the end of his visions of clerical failings is not for revolution but for all the estates of Christian society to pray for the clergy (IV. 1231-32).

In line with his view of society as consisting of the three estates, Gower never doubts that the earthly Church is a divine institution encompassing all the estates, and that the hierarchy and clergy are an immutable part of God's

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[99]Fisher, p. 159.

design. The Church therefore is necessarily a part of the visible society, and such ideas as the "true" Church as an "invisible body of the predestinate" had little attraction for him. Gower is concerned that men exercise their wills for the good of society, and rejects trusting in "Fortune" (a secular way of saying foreordination).[100] His interest was not in developing novel quasi-mystical understandings of the Church, but with defining and urging to fulfillment the function of the Church in the visible social order.[101]

Viewing as he did the Church as a part of the immutable divine order, Gower criticizes even the grossest abuse in that institution with an air of apology for his boldness. In the Mirour de l'Omme (18448 ff., 19059 ff., 21183 ff.) he seems to attempt to remove himself from direct attack on the clergy by saying that the abuses he reports are not those of his personal knowledge, but reflect those things which are commonly reported among the people.[102] In the Vox (III. 1675-1710) he allows weight to the assertion of the clergy that they are not to be judged by laymen, but defends his writing on the duty of all Christians to warn their brothers when they see them wandering into sin.[103]

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[100]George G. Fox, The Mediaeval Sciences in the Works of John Gower (New York: Haskell House, 1966), pp. 7, 14-15.

[101]Pearsall, p. 8; Stockton, p. 17.

[102]Fisher, p. 157.

[103]See also Fisher, p. 159.

Yet, in spite of all his strictures against the clergy, Gower still acknowledges his spiritual dependence on them, and the original version of the Vox concludes:

> Omnibus ipse tamen peior sum, sed releuamen
> Det michi per flamen conditor orbis. Amen.
>
> (I myself am the worst of sinners; but may the founder of the world grant me relief through a priest. p, 470, n. 6).

This ending was later altered to permit a smoother transition to the Tripartite Chronicle appended to the Vox, but the sentiment was not rejected. It is also significant to note that while Gower in the Vox denounces scholars who do not use their knowledge for the proper spiritual purposes (III. 2083), and while in the Carmen he denounces those who would seek to "explain the unexplainable" (ll. 48-53), he nevertheless unconsciously(?) echoes the paradoxical advice of the greatest of medieval logicians who questioned the logical conclusions of the faith, William of Ockham, by advocating unreasoning submission to the Church's teaching:[104] "Subde tuam fidei mentem" (l. 54). Gower, however, has revealed himself as a far more likely candidate than Ockham for putting this dictum into practice.

So it is that questions concerning the nature and practice of the Church constitute an important part of the writings of Gower. With these matters he is more directly,

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[104]See above, p. 48.

or at least more explicitly, concerned than was Chaucer, and it has been suggested that the supposed rift between Chaucer and Gower was caused in part by Gower's feeling that the later productions of his friend did not deal directly enough with upbuilding the morals and institutions of men.[105] Be this as it may, in the course of his lengthy corpus Gower has provided as complete a picture of the Church on earth as did Dante, and his continual systematic cataloging and subdividing of sins and classes of men reminds one of the sense of order, though perhaps not the poetic fire, of the Florentine. In both, the divine system and organization exists, and men have only to conform to it.[106] This means that Gower is able to treat the Church in a more confident manner than will be found in Langland. Indeed, it has been suggested that in referring to those who teach men to do "bad, worse, and worst," (I. 1121-22) Gower is slapping at the author of Piers Plowman, whom he may have blamed for inciting the peasants to rebel against the divine order by suggesting that a peasant plowman could show the way to salvation better than the clergy.[107] One hesitates to follow this assumption too far, but it is nonetheless true that while he himself uses the plowman analogy for the clergy as workers in Christ's field (IV.

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[105]Pearsall, p. 11.

[106]See Pearsall, p. 7.

[107]Stockton, p. 24.

931-36), he uses it in the manner of a safe, traditional, classical, pastoral allusion which does not call forth a flesh and blood farmer of fourteenth century England.

From all of the above points, it may be concluded that Gower held a basically institutional view of the Church. There are problems, to be sure, in the actual practice of some of its members, but he never doubts that the divine essence is there, nor is there any suggestion of any other means for salvation than the visible hierarchical Church.[108] Neither does ecclesiology in a narrow sense become the all absorbing question for him as it did for some others, for while he would certainly agree that all of society is within the Church, he devotes great attention as well to political, general moral, and societal questions in forming his view of man and life.[109] In the final analysis, even Gower's most far-reaching strictures stem from traditional derivations,[110] and the view of the Church presented in Gower's works is one which the average, pious, conservative medieval educated man could relate to and understand.

Conclusion

The above pages have shown how Dante, Chaucer, and Gower used the Church and its problems as a topic in

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[108]See, e.g., Vox Clamantis, III, 1299 ff., 2141-42.

[109]Stockton, p. 41; Pearsall, p. 101.

[110]Ker, pp. 104, 129-30; Pearsall, p. 9; Fisher, p. 35.

imaginative literature. Gower has proved to have done this most explicitly though perhaps less deeply, but Dante has produced a work of great scope and vision, while Chaucer has provided a less obviously metaphysical and smaller production, but one which is no less significant. These poets had similar ideals of what the Church on earth should be—an institution of holy simplicity and service reflective of the qualities of Christ himself. Likewise they brought similar charges against the Church for failing to live up to this ideal. All three men used many and varied sources for their presentations, and while it is possible that Chaucer received some of his inspiration direct from Dante, or that Chaucer and Gower influenced each other, this is a question beyond this present study. In any case, one may see how the Church was used successfully by three noted, but very different, men in three very different classics of fourteenth century literature.

Langland, as will be shown, was confronted by similar questions and issues and had similar difficulties with the organizational Church to attempt to resolve as he recorded his own pilgrimage. Dante, Chaucer, and Gower will be referred to in the following examination of how Langland wrestled with these matters in Piers Plowman. This is not to say that Langland depended on any of these men directly in his own work, for there is nothing to prove that Langland had read any of their works. This study has thus far,

however, explored the theological climate and crisis of the Church in Langland's day, and has taken at least a brief look at three of the major artistic works of the fourteenth century which deal with the same issues as does he. This should provide a useful background for making proper judgments concerning the place and handling of these issues in Piers Plowman as the work of Langland himself is examined.

CHAPTER V

THE VISIO: WILL, PIERS, AND LADY HOLY CHURCH

Following the magnificent but chaotic vision of the Prologue to Piers Plowman, Passus I opens with the appearance of the first of the many guides who will try to help the Dreamer along his way. His panoramic view of human society has left him with questions concerning the meaning of the sights he has seen. At this point, he tells us:

> A louely lady of leere in lynnen ycloþed
> Cam doun from [þe] Castel and called me faire,
> And seide, 'sone, slepestow? sestow þis peple,
> How bisie þei ben aboute þe maȝe? (I. 3-6).

This lady, for all the simplicity of her description, and in spite of her beauty and the gentleness of her manner, fills the Dreamer with a sense of awe. He recognizes her at once as someone who may provide him with an explanation of his vision: "I was afered of hire face þeiȝ she fair weere / And seide, 'mercy, madame, what [may] þis [by] meene?'" (I. 10-11). Well might the Dreamer feel awe in her presence, and he is quite correct in assuming that she is something more than an ordinary lady, for as is revealed later (I. 75) she is Lady Holy Church, who proceeds at once to begin the explanation of the Castle, Dungeon, and Field

of Folk. As John Lawlor notes, it is her appearance that sets the action of the poem proper into motion.[1]

As Lady Holy Church proceeds to explain to the Dreamer the meaning of the Tower and the Dungeon, and as she leads him through the first steps of comprehending man's responsibility in relation to those two extremes, she is fulfilling the role which properly belongs to the Church—that of the guide and interpreter of life and action. In the course of her address to the Dreamer she points not only to the right use of the world's goods, but also to the eternal world beyond, leaving no doubt that one's eternal fate is inextricably linked to the choices of this present life. Throughout this passage she assumes the role of a wise teacher, and the Dreamer, by his questions, that of the student with much to learn. Her question to him at her first appearance, "sone, slepestow," refers not so much to a condition of physical sleep as to a sluggishness of the spirit.[2] The Lady engages in dialogue with the Dreamer, but the purpose of this discussion is plainly to impart to him authoritative knowledge, and he is specifically warned not to trust to his physical senses alone in responding to the Church's message (I. 38-42).

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[1]Piers Plowman: An Essay in Criticism (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), p. 19.

[2]Robertson and Huppé, p. 37.

This air of authority which is assumed by Lady Holy Church is buttressed by further indications within the poem of her heavenly origin. The simple picture of the fair lady dressed all in white coming down from a castle to talk to the Dreamer has overtones and associations of a far more spectacular nature. As Robertson and Huppé say, "In Biblical commentary we find an intimate relationship established between a tower on a mountain and the church."[3] Even if the reader misses such allusions to ecclesiastical iconography and commentary, the Lady herself proceeds to dispel all doubt as to her origin and prime significance. She tells the Dreamer:

> 'Holi chirche I am', quod she; 'þow ouȝtest me to knowe.
> I vnderfeng þee first and þ[i] feiþ [þee] tauȝte.
> [Thow] brouȝtest me borwes my biddyng to [werche],
> To louen me leelly while þi lif dureþ.' (I. 75-78).

In the beginning of the next passus she expands upon this to say: "My fader þe grete god is and ground of alle graces, / Oo god wiþouten gynnyng, and I his goode douȝter;" (II. 29-30). The Dreamer accepts this identification of the fair lady and bows before her authority (I. 79). For the reader too, the poem provides not the slightest hint that the claims of the Lady are not to be accepted without demur.

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[3]Robertson and Huppé, p. 35. Comments by Augustine, Bede, and the Glossa ordinaria on such passages as Luke 9: 29-33, Psalm 14:1, and Rev. 21:2-11 are particularly adduced to establish the traditional nature of this imagery.

The issue then is not "Is the Lady the Church?" She is—but there still remains the critical question: "In what sense is she the Church?" Given the nature of her presentation in this opening portion of Piers Plowman, it appears that J. F. Goodridge is correct in referring to her as "the perfect heavenly Church."[4] That is, the Church as presented here is essentially a spiritual rather than an institutional entity. She appears rather like an ideal in a platonic sense of the term, having much in common with St. Augustine's conception of the perfect Church as it exists in the mind of God. Certainly there is little if anything of the earthly about her. She may be presented in human form, but it is more as a "fairy princess" than as a creature of flesh and blood. She strikes the reader as ontologically distinct from (though not necessarily opposed to) other clerical figures within the poem, as will soon be apparent. For these reasons, the characterization given of her by Robertson and Huppé in this case seems particularly instructive:

> It is here that the poet has the anagogical church, the church celestial, reveal the principle of Charity which is the foundation of Jerusalem. She stands as an ideal toward which the allegorical church militant should strive.[5]

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[4] J. F. Goodridge, trans., Piers the Ploughman, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 264. Citations from the notes in this translation are referred to as Goodridge.

[5] Robertson and Huppé, p. 48.

As such, Lady Holy Church, the daughter of God, can speak with a divine authority.

She does indeed speak a great many things to the Dreamer, and in so doing fulfills the role of the teacher of pure doctrine, a teacher who has answers for all his questions. Indeed, in the last portion of Passus I (85-209) she replies to his crucial question "How may I save my soul?" with a succinct but surprisingly comprehensive summary of the core of the Christian Gospel. Beginning with a "text" verse: "Whan alle tresors arn tried treuþe is þe beste" (I. 85), she affirms that "God is love" (deus caritas), and proceeds to explain that those who would belong to God must reflect the divine truth and love in their own lives. In expanding upon this theme, however, she also includes references to the Trinity, the fall of the angels, the creation of the world, the fall of man, the Law of Moses, the incarnation and atoning death of Christ, and the Second Coming.[6] She likewise stresses the fact that a simple belief in the truth of these matters is not sufficient, but that true faith includes following the example of Christ, i.e., putting love and loyalty into practice in one's life, whatever his status. This, asserts Lady Holy Church, is the Truth to which she bears authoritative witness.

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[6]For the specifics of these allusions, see, e.g., I. 109, 111 ff., 126 f., 151 f., 153-55, 161 f., 166-68.

Here and elsewhere, Lady Holy Church clearly sets before the Dreamer the true way of salvation,[7] and it is not without reason that Dunning compares her and certain aspects of her teaching to that of Beatrice in Dante's Commedia (Paradiso, V).[8] In actual fact, the Lady has answered the Dreamer's question even before his pilgrimage begins. The teaching of Lady Holy Church has presented in summary form the substance of what the rest of the poem explores and experiences in greater detail. As Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter) notes: "Nothing in Piers Plowman ever contradicts these words; in a very real sense they are final."[9]

The special nature of Lady Holy Church is drawn into sharp relief by the contrast she presents to the worldly characters in the opening passages of the poem. She remains as a simple, though radiant, figure of divine authority. Of quite a different sort are the wondering Dreamer, the scurrying tradesmen of the Field of Folk, and even the clerics (of whom much more later). The sharpest contrast, of course, is presented by Lady Meed. This difference is apparent even to the naked eye.[10] Lady Holy Church is

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[7]Frank, p. 19.

[8]T. P. Dunning, Piers Plowman: An Interpretation of the A-Text (London: Longman's, Green, 1937), p. 41.

[9]Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, NS 11 (1958), 3.

[10]Frank, p. 20; Lawlor, pp. 20-21.

beautiful, but hers is a pure and quiet beauty, and she is dressed in plain white. Lady Meed also has beauty, but she is bedecked as a queen: "Hire Robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned, / Wiþ Ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones." (II. 15-16). Small wonder that the Dreamer is "rauysshed" with the richness of her attire (II. 17). Lady Meed's outward difference from Lady Holy Church betokens an inward difference of nature, for while Lady Church is the daughter of God (II. 29), she assures us that Lady Meed is the daughter of False (II. 25), and is thus her mortal enemy.

The portrait of Lady Meed has an obvious relation to that of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17. If Lady Holy Church is an ideal archetypal figure, then it is reasonable to assume that Lady Meed has something of the same function in the opposite extreme. Robertson and Huppé are probably correct in suggesting a correspondence between the tower and the dungeon; the heavenly Jerusalem and fallen Babylon; and Lady Holy Church and Lady Meed.[11] Yet, as the progress of the poem reveals, Lady Holy Church retains her elevated "ideal" nature, whereas Lady Meed quickly enters the piece as an active participant, becoming the earthly embodiment of the falseness she typifies. This, Lady Holy Church does not do, and she maintains her heavenly and

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[11]Robertson and Huppé, pp. 17, 48, 49.

unlimited eternal quality. She knows the world, but she is definitely not of this world.

This fact creates a problem, for while Lady Holy Church may not be of the world, the Dreamer (along with every man) certainly is. He must live in the world, however perverted it may be, and if he is to attain to the ideal or perfect realm for which Lady Holy Church is the spokesman, it is within the framework of the temporal and finite world that he must begin to work out his salvation. In one sense Lady Holy Church may personify things as they should be, but Lady Meed shows things as they are. Here is where man's ascent must start, and this is so not only because of Langland's abiding interest in human society, but also because this is how God chooses to work with his creatures according to the entirety of the Scriptural witness.

So it is that Lady Holy Church refers the Dreamer to her earthly representatives for guidance, not to the heavenly sights and beatific vision which awaited Dante. Lady Holy Church truly reminds one of Beatrice, but like Beatrice she is a guide who must disappear, who must relinquish her charge to other guides, at least until the pilgrimage has attained its ultimate eternal goal. It was therefore not simple forgetfulness which caused the poet to omit her from the poem after line 51 of Passus II.

This does not mean that Lady Holy Church is in any sense rejected. She remains the true servant of God. As

Bloomfield observes of her relations with the Dreamer:

> The theme of the whole poem is explicit in this scene, and the rest of the poem is a working out in detail, sometimes endless detail, of the speech of Lady Holy Church.[12]

Yet the "detail" must be worked out, for the Dreamer is not ready to jump to heaven directly—and as God has shown in his relations with Israel, and especially in Christ Himself, this working out is to come within the confines of the temporal world, through symbols and finite spokesmen for the Eternal.

Here again a problem arises, a most crucial problem, which will face the Dreamer (and the reader) again and again as the poem progresses. Unfortunately, the persons who should reflect the ideal Church do so only very imperfectly, and many of the Church's so-called representatives align themselves much more naturally with Meed and her allies than with the pure Lady. The Dreamer is faced from the outset with a real, and perhaps fatal disparity. Even in the Prologue the vast majority of the clerical figures, far from marshalling the Folk into an orderly pilgrimage to the Castle of Truth, seem as caught up in the chaotic whirl of the Plain as are the masses they are supposed to lead. It is true that there are faithful hermits and anchorites who devote themselves to holy lives (Prol. 25-30), but the

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[12]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 153.

influence of these is minimal, for by the nature of their calling they are at one remove from the world around them. Some would find in the diligent plowmen of lines 20-22 a reference not to simple peasants, but rather spiritual churchmen who sow the word of God.[13] Even if this is so, these plowmen have their false imitators who seem to labor for the common welfare, but in reality work only with prideful spirits for gain for themselves. In any case, it is difficult for men to distinguish the true from the false. Certainly the leaders of the organizational Church fail to be adequate representatives of Truth, and all come in for criticism, from the pope and cardinals (II. 23; Prol. 107-11) to the parish priests (Prol. 83-86; I. 190-97), as well as bishops, pardoners, Doctors of Divinity and all in between (Prol. 68-90). As in so many fourteenth century writings this problem of clerical worthiness is especially typified in the Visio of Piers Plowman by the friars. In the adventures of Lady Meed at Westminster it is a friar who offers her an easy absolution, thus allowing the divine as well as the regal justice to be perverted (III. 35 ff.), though other clergy are far from blameless in their relations with the Lady Meed (III. 26 ff.). Early in the Prologue (58 ff.) the friars are likewise found perverting the

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[13]Robertson and Huppé, pp. 17-19.

message of Truth for personal gain, and the dissension this causes is viewed in the gravest terms: "But holy chirche and hij holde bettre togidres / The mooste meschief on Molde is mountynge [vp] faste." (Prol. 66-67).

Examples of this sort might be multiplied, and countless similar instances may be found in other parts of the poem. What has already been seen is sufficient, however, to indicate the dimensions of the Dreamer's difficulty in progressing in a smooth fashion to a deeper understanding of the central teachings of Lady Holy Church. Progress would indeed be simple if the figures of the Church on earth truly reflected, albeit in a finite way, the ideal of the Lady. Yet such is not the case, and one can see already that a tonsure, even a mitre, is no guarantee that one is a true workman for truth. At the same time, one must also realize that these divergences from the heavenly ideal do not (at least at this stage) serve to divorce completely the earthly Church from the heavenly ideal. Rather, they serve to indicate that the Dreamer must be discriminating in seeking help for developing whatever "kynde knowledge" (I. 140) of God lies within his heart. One may see too that the road to Truth might involve many turnings and rough spots. The whole of Piers Plowman bears out this initial assumption.

There remain additional dimensions to these difficulties near the poem's beginning. In the first place, while

there is no doubt that Lady Holy Church knows the correct answers to the Dreamer's questions, what she says to him does not really prove very helpful for bringing him to the attainment of Truth within the temporal context within which he must exist. This is certainly due in no small part to Will's (the Dreamer's) own dullness and unspiritual state.[14] Yet, as Mary Carruthers points out, a large part of the problem lies in the "failure of the orthodox rhetoric of the church to make meaningful statements about the world to those who live on the field of folk."[15] Lady Holy Church speaks directly from above, but Langland's attitude echoes that of St. Augustine:

> Thus in this mortal life, wandering from God, if we wish to return to our native country where we can be blessed we should use this world . . . so that the "invisible things" of God "being understood by the things that are made" [Romans 1:20] may be seen, that is, so that by means of corporal and temporal things we may comprehend the eternal and spiritual.[16]

The crucial task, then, is to find adequate "signs" and representatives in this life to lead one securely to the life beyond. These, presumably, should be within the

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[14]Lawlor, pp. 20-21; David Mills, "The Role of the Dreamer in Piers Plowman," in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 180-212.

[15]The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 15.

[16]De Doctrina Christiana, I, 4, 4; cited and trans. by Carruthers, p. 15.

institutional Church on earth, but the Dreamer has encountered the Church's "image problem" and he is still left with the original dilemma—it is certain that all elements of the earthly Church do not reflect "Truth" in a meaningful way, and there is an anguishing question as to where and how (if at all) the corporate Church reflects the Heavenly Church.

In the course of the Visio there emerge still other difficulties for Will's appropriating the message of Lady Holy Church. A crucial point of her teaching is indirectly called into question by Theology, even as he attempts to stand as a spokesman for truth. Lady Holy Church in her explanation of Lady Meed to the Dreamer has said that the latter is the illegitimate daughter of False (II. 24 f.), and that accordingly she is a figure of pure evil to be avoided. As Lawlor says:

> Meed is therefore the direct enemy of the teaching which Holy Church has enjoined upon the Dreamer, whether that teaching be thought of primarily as doctrine (Meed is the daughter of Falsehood) or, more searchingly, as love.[17]

Later in the same passus (II. 119 ff.), however, Theology, although he strenuously objects to Meed's marriage to Favel (Fraud), has quite a different version of her parentage. He says that she is a "muliere," an honest woman,[18] and

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[17]Lawlor, p. 22.

[18]Skeat, II, 400; Goodridge, pp. 41, 266-67.

that her father is "Amendes," satisfaction or lawful restitution.[19] His objection to the marriage is not that Meed is innately evil, but that in a union with Favel this potentially good character will be perverted. Theology may be correct in seeing Meed (bribery) as a perversion of lex talionis, but his insistence on her potential "good" nature sets the stage for a blurring of Holy Church's perception of this Meed as the offspring of evil.

Others have noted this disparity concerning Meed's parentage,[20] and still others have explained it as no real disparity at all. Robertson and Huppé say that

> There is no contradiction between Holy Church's claim that Meed is a bastard, the daughter of False, and Theology's statement that Meed is a "moiere," that is, a legitimate child, the daughter of Amends.[21]

They support this claim by going on to state that Holy Church is giving a general warning to Will concerning the misuse of worldly goods. Theology, on the other hand, recognizes that there are two forms of Meed, one evil and one good (the workman is worthy of his hire). Theology, they say, is protesting against a specific case where rightful Meed may be perverted.

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[19]Skeat, II, 309; Goodridge, p. 41.

[20]E.g., Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 96.

[21]Robertson and Huppé, p. 56.

Theology may indeed be making a useful distinction here, but his words are nevertheless at variance with those of Lady Holy Church, and serve to turn her clear black and white of right and wrong into a sort of gray. Whatever his intention, Theology gives Lady Meed a less than total condemnation, and she is able to use part of his argument for her own selfish interest to beguile men in another situation (III. 170 ff.). The reader should also note that Conscience refuses the King's urging to marry Lady Meed, citing her as a chief source of the corruption and disloyalty which afflict both Church and state, thus adding his support to Lady Holy Church's charges.

Indeed, the further speech of Conscience is most helpful in deciding the true nature of Lady Meed. He says (III. 230-353) that there are two sorts of rewards: one which God in His grace gives to those who serve faithfully on earth, and another which is the "lucre of the world." This latter is not to be confused with the fair "exchange" of wages for labor for it is sought out of selfishness for personal profit. <u>This</u> is the sort of payment represented by Meed, and he looks forward to a day when the Kingdom of God will reign on earth and such false reward will be no more. This is an important point, for it clearly establishes that Meed, even in her best aspect, is a creature of the world after the Fall—and it points to the Kingdom of God wherein such a thing is not necessary, where all

reward is of the superabundant grace (undeserved favor) of God, and men will serve him not for payment, but in gratitude.[22]

In any case, Lady Meed's actions at Westminster clearly evidence the wisdom of Lady Holy Church's warning against her.[23] She is a creature of guile and cunning, but scarcely of true nobility in any sense. Theology speaks of Lady Meed from a worldly perspective, and while this may in some sense be necessary given the present fallen situation of the world, in Theology's statements the simple teaching of Lady Holy Church is not only refined, but also diluted for Meed's benefit. Whatever the reason, Theology's teaching gives Meed an opportunity to work further harm. Langland does not belabor this point for the present, but one may find in it a sad commentary on the times. Theology, even with the best of intentions, does not aid, but blurs the teaching of Holy Church. This means that the plight of the Dreamer is heightened as he seeks to gain wisdom for his spiritual progress from Truth's spokesmen on earth. Perhaps

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[22]This "kingdom" described by Conscience may not be the Kingdom of God in its fullest sense, but it certainly anticipates it. Carruthers, p. 58, sees Conscience's description as that of an "enlightened" but not necessarily spiritual society. The added lines of the C-Text (317-410) seem to support my reading. See Skeat, II, 89-93.

[23]A. G. Mitchell, "Lady Meed and the Art of Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Anthology, p. 175.

this is simply in the nature of things, but it lays the basis for the difficulties which beset Will throughout the poem.

As has been established, Lady Holy Church is the spiritual ideal of the Church, and the Dreamer's converse with her comes as close to a direct mystical experience of the heavenly world as anything else in the poem. This is a fleeting experience, however, and she disappears from the poem after Passus II. 51. As Bloomfield observes:

> Perhaps it was because he [Langland] felt that the voice of the true church was so hard to hear in his time that he makes of her a minor character in the search for spiritual instruction.[24]

The poem has also already pictured some of the inadequacies of the finite figures through which the Dreamer is to approach his goal. This does not exhaust the relevant material in the Visio, however, for there is yet to be considered the person, nature, and function of that most important of characters: Piers the Plowman himself.

Piers makes his first appearance in Passus V of the Visio. Following the downfall of Lady Meed, the confession of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the resolution of the people to undertake a pilgrimage to St. Truth; the action receives a check, for no one knows the way to this shrine. A Palmer whom they encounter is unable to help them (V. 513-36). At

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[24]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 20.

this point, help appears from an unexpected source: "'Peter!' quod a Plowman and putte forþ his had: / 'I knowe hym as kyndely as clerc doþ his bokes." (V. 537-38). This Piers the Plowman gladly offers to lead the Folk to Truth himself. At last, it appears, Will has found someone who can serve as a bridge between the temporal world and the heavenly realm of Lady Holy Church.

Such an assumption leads at once to the question: "Who and what is this Piers?" He is obviously a simple, hard-working farmer, but his intimate knowledge of Truth suggests that he is no ordinary one. This suspicion is given additional support by the richness of Biblical imagery, wherein the Kingdom of God is expressed through an agricultural motif.[25] The full significance of this figure, however, has proven to be one of the thorniest problems in critical literature.

Scholarly interpretations of Piers, even restricting this to his role in the Visio, are nearly as numerous as the scholars themselves. A sampling of the various opinions will serve to indicate something of the range of options open to the reader. E. Talbot Donaldson insists that whatever Piers may become, one's view of him must remain closely

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[25]Cf. Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 106; Carruthers, pp. 154-55.

tied to the "simple farmer" of his first appearance.[26] R. W. Frank, Jr. sees him as "uncorrupted human nature" and as a symbol of "the suprahuman or divine element in human nature, which is proof that man is savable."[27] Howard William Troyer attempts to answer the question "Who is Piers Plowman?" by saying that he is

> a multiform symbol. He is allegorically man the race. He is sometimes an individual man, who is in his integrity a picture of moral perfection in the functions of society which the race has developed. And he is also the great God-man, the highest achievement of the race in the figure of its own redeemer.[28]

In the Visio, of course, it is principally the former rather than the latter aspects of Troyer's general characterization which are operative. Piers in the early passus of the poem has also been described as a sort of Old Testament prophetic figure looking forward, and in part anticipating, the full revelation of Christ.[29] Piers has also been described as "the embodiment of the [divine] image through history,"[30] while others would emphasize an explicit tie to

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[26]Piers Plowman: The C-Text and its Poet, rev. ed., Yale Studies in English, No. 113 (1949; rpt. n.p.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 188.

[27]Frank, pp. 13, 15.

[28]"Who is Piers Plowman?", PMLA, 47 (1932), 384.

[29]Ruth M. Ames, The Fulfillment of the Scriptures: Abraham, Moses and Piers (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 91, 169; Lawlor, pp. 56, 63.

[30]Barbara Raw, "Piers Plowman and the Image of God in Man," in Hussey, pp. 143-79.

Christ from the beginning.[31] Mention must also be made of a modern Czech scholar who after lengthy researches into medieval allegorical and rhetorical methods has decided that Piers is after all none other than Wat Tyler![32] Robertson and Huppé see Piers throughout the poem as an "embodiment of the ideal prelatical status."[33] Considering all these possibilities en masse it is easy to agree beforehand with a statement made by Mary Carruthers on the place of Piers in the work as a whole: "It is extremely difficult to put all these manifestations into a conceptually coherent character."[34]

Yet, it is necessary to make at least a preliminary assessment of Piers, for he is essential to any consideration of Langland's ecclesiology. Taking a cue from Lady Holy Church, who assures the Dreamer that "Mesure is medicine" (I. 35), the best course appears to be to steer a careful mean between these critical extremes. Father Dunning offers helpful counsel when he warns that one must avoid reading into the Piers of the Visio too much of the

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[31]Hort, p. 25; Carruthers, p. 62.

[32]Ladislav Cejp, Metody Středověcké Alegorie a Langlanduv Petr Oráč (Prague: Statni Pedagogické Nakladatelstvi, 1961), p. 200.

[33]Robertson and Huppé, pp. 75-82.

[34]Carruthers, p. 170.

added dimensions he assumes in the latter portions of the B-Text, though this cannot be avoided entirely.[35]

Despite the ambiguities which surround the figure of Piers, he does indeed stand as a representative of the true Church on earth, and as such he assumes a crucial role in the relationship between the world of the Dreamer and the ideal realm of Lady Holy Church. In this early portion of the poem, however, he is far more the "simple righteous Christian" than he is an embodiment of the faithful hierarchy. He may be a plowman who feeds the spirit as well as the body, but such a hierarchical view of him as that of Robertson and Huppé cited above accords far better with Passus XIX and XX than with V-VII. Piers, however, does betoken the abiding presence and saving activity of God to man—in theological terms, he is a manifestation of the Heilsgeschichte. In his simple integrity he is a witness to the working out of the divine ideal within the temporal universe. Nevertheless, Piers' full actualization of this role is incomplete in the Visio, and those scholars who would see him as typifying at this stage a sort of "Old Testament revelation" have a certain merit in their view. At the same time, even if Piers at this point is viewed as the embodiment of Old Testament "works righteousness," he is more than the unaided natural powers of man, for the Law

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[35]Dunning, A-Text, p. 119.

of Moses was also a gift of grace, although it required a fulfillment in Christ.[36] For all this, Piers, because he is a human figure who can lead to Truth, even in the Visio is a manifestation of the incarnational theology which is the core of Christianity. He is a voice of Truth speaking in the finite world. This is why he can develop in subsequent portions of the poem to personify Christ Himself.

Whether Langland had this clearly in mind when he first sat down to compose the A-Text is a matter of doubt. The more reasonable explanation, it seems to me, is that like the Natty Bumppo of Cooper, he began as a concrete character whose mythic qualities were to emerge only slowly with further reflection and work. One finds it hard to agree with Greta Hort that the medieval reader could see "from the very beginning" what Piers would become.[37] He is at this stage an unfinished, though not necessarily an imperfect, image. Piers is a worthy leader of the pilgrims, but there is irony in the fact that Piers himself is a pilgrim who must go through much to come to his end. As Frank says, he shows in the second vision of the Visio how man can begin to follow love and salvation.[38] Much more, however, remains to be said and experienced.

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[36]Cf. Carruthers, p. 70.

[37]Hort, p. 25.

[38]Frank, p. 21.

All this being noted, it is still necessary to attempt to define more clearly the relation of Piers to the institutional Church at the end of the Visio. For this purpose a brief examination of the problematical pardon scene (particularly the tearing of the pardon) may prove helpful. Although it is one of the high dramatic moments of the whole poem, it has engendered as wide a divergence of critical opinions as that of the nature of Piers himself.[39] In light of this, Donaldson is certainly correct in saying that the tearing of the pardon is omitted from the C-Text because it proved to be more an element of confusion than of instruction.[40] Nevertheless, the issue of immediate concern at the moment, the relation of Piers to the institutional Church, hinges on this scene.

Following Passus VI, in which Piers sets the world to work on his half acre, Passus VII opens with the granting of a pardon which renders the proposed pilgrimage to Truth unnecessary. This pardon is from Truth Himself, and promises remission a pena et a culpa for all who help Piers in his labor in the field (VII. 1-8). All this seems to have

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[39]The multitudinous issues in question are much too involved to treat fully here. For representative literature on the subject, see Nevill Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Anthology, pp. 40-86; John Barrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision," in Blanch, Anthology, pp. 209-27; Ames, pp. 166-69; Carruthers, pp. 69-80; Frank, pp. 24-28; Robertson and Huppé, pp. 92-95.

[40]Donaldson, C-Text, p. 163.

to do with building a Christian society upon the earth,[41] and the nobility, hierarchy, merchants, and other elements of society are each enjoined to fulfill their respective responsibilities (VII. 9 ff.). It appears that the poem may be reaching a resolution of the human dilemma, but this progress receives a sharp check when a priest steps forward and offers to "interpret" the pardon (VII. 107-08). Upon examining the words of the pardon, the Dreamer looking over his shoulder, the priest finds that it contains only two lines: "Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum." (VII. 113-14). This, the priest declares, is no true pardon at all, and Piers "for pure tene" tears the pardon in two (VII. 119). Piers resolves to devote himself to more spiritual activity in the future, the priest insults him, they fall to arguing, and the noise of their dispute awakens the Dreamer (VII. 122-47).

This scene presents several related problems: the nature of the pardon itself, the meaning of the tearing of the pardon, and the character of the disputing priest. As regards the first of these issues, there can be no doubt that the pardon is valid, for it comes from Truth Himself (VII. 1 ff.). Its wording, moreover, consists of two lines

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[41]Goodridge, p. 279, n. 2.

from the end of the Athanasian Creed.[42] It is therefore a true "pardon," but one whose conditions are impossible for fallen man to fulfill—he cannot of himself "do well" (VII. 116). Standing alone, the words of the pardon, like the Law of Moses, can only make man aware of his failure (cf. Romans 7:7). Robertson and Huppé say that one is to hear the opening as well as the conclusion of the Creed in the words of Piers' pardon,[43] but while the redemption may be implied in the pardon, it is surely in a most ambiguous manner at this stage. Piers and his folk here have an affinity to the Israelite community of the Old Testament[44]—the voice of God is truly heard, but His words await a fulfillment and clearer understanding. Hence the need for a continued, and inner, pilgrimage of the spirit.

This leads to the second problem of the scene, namely the tearing of the pardon. The action might imply a rejection of the pardon, but this hardly accords with the character of Piers and his relation to Truth. The similarity of the tearing to the smashing by Moses of the Tables of the Law has been noted more than once.[45] Some have seen it

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[42]Goodridge, p. 278.

[43]Robertson and Huppé, p. 93.

[44]Carruthers, p. 73.

[45]E.g., Goodridge, p. 278; Carruthers, p. 70.

as an image of the Atonement,[46] while the tearing might also be read from a Wycliffite perspective as a rejection of the paper pardons given by the hierarchical Church, and an affirmation of the true pardon written on the heart.[47] This latter position seems too strong, especially since the validity of Church indulgences is specifically affirmed at the close of the passus (VII. 182-84). Although a trusting in the letter rather than the spirit of such documents is certainly condemned (VIII. 185-192), this is hardly revolutionary or anti-ecclesiastical doctrine.

However this may be, the third problem in the pardon scene, i.e., the priest who argues with Piers, presents a concrete issue of ecclesiology. Here again a representative of the visible Church fails to fulfill, or only partially fulfills, his proper task. What he says is true enough; the document is no pardon in the usual sense of the word. This it was surely his responsibility to point out,[48] but he speaks only as a pedantic scholastic whose sole interest is in properly construing the literal words to impress ignorant peasants. The priest fails to recognize that the pardon <u>does</u> come from Truth, and he fails to go on

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[46]E.g., Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman." Also note Donaldson's objections to this view in <u>C-Text</u>, pp. 162-63.

[47]Carruthers, p. 79; John Barrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision," p. 263.

[48]Dunning, <u>A-Text</u>, p. 141.

to explain the wider implications of the pardon and its fulfillment in Christ. Whatever the priest's original motive, the pilgrims get from him only schoolmen's dialectic, not the "cure of souls." Piers instinctively knows that there is more to Truth's message, and so sets out to find it for himself.

In this last and somewhat unsettling action of the Visio, Piers retains his role as the embodiment of God's saving activity in history, albeit he is here something like the covenant community of Israel going forward to seek, and ultimately to bring forth the Christ. He also has a more immediate application to the Dreamer in this case, for as St. Augustine holds, "the historical progression from Old Law to New is (or should be) recapitulated in the life of every Christian in every age."[49] Leaving aside all technicalities of time and place, this progression is precisely what the priest, the agent of the institutional Church, is impeding. Piers sharply opposes this priest, leaving him behind in his spiritual growth. In so doing, he also leaves unanswered questions concerning his own ultimate relation to the institution for which the priest speaks.

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[49]Carruthers, p. 73, citing De diversis quaestionibus, I, Q. 66, 3. See Migne, PL, 40:62.

In the Visio we (the readers of the poem) have seen a "sick society which needs to be purged and reformed"[50]—the image of fallen man. We have met Will, the Dreamer, an everyman in search of that purgation and reformation. Through him we have encountered Lady Holy Church, the heavenly ideal of the Church, who can aid the Dreamer only by pointing him to the world around him. With the Dreamer we have already experienced something of the failure of the earthly representatives who are charged with expounding the message of Lady Holy Church and Truth. In Piers the Plowman we have found a bridge between this world and the next, an expression of the ideal in earthly terms. This manifestation is as yet imperfect and unfulfilled, and although Piers is far from totally rejecting the hierarchical Church, he is by no means strictly synonymous with it in all aspects. At the end of the Visio Piers remains the guide and touchstone in the soul's search for salvation; yet the rest of the poem will show that this search is not only to "save the soul," but also a search for the Church in which that soul is to be saved, a search which must pass over often difficult and confusing, even treacherous, terrain.

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[50]Frank, p. 33.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH ON EARTH: DOWEL, DOBET, AND THE BEGINNING OF DOBEST

The Visio has left unanswered questions concerning the relation of Lady Holy Church, Piers, and the hierarchical Church on earth. In the latter portion of the Vita (Passus XVIII and XIX) many of these issues find an apparent resolution. Will, having worked his way through much confusion and delusion, and having finally progressed beyond his "natural faculties" has attained a glimpse of Faith, Hope, and Charity. He is at last ready for a personal vision and appropriation of the Redemption in Christ, a vision which will lead him directly to an exposition of the founding of the institution through which Christ chose to continue His work on earth—the Catholic Church.

The entirety of Passus XVIII is a passage of great beauty and moving simplicity. In many of these lines Langland manages to express the glory and pathos of the Passion as well as man has ever been able to do. What could better express the union of the human and divine than:

> 'This Iesus of his gentries wol Iuste in Piers armes,
> In his helm and in his haubergeon, humana natura;
> That crist be noȝt [y]knowe here for consummatus deus

> In Piers paltok þe Plowman þis prikiere shal ryde,
> For no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate patris*.'
> (XVIII. 22-26).

Not only the imagery, but also the macaronic lines, not usually art of the highest sort, perfectly befit this great dualistic mystery. The death of Christ likewise receives memorable expression in lines of Anglo-Saxon strength:

> '*Consummatum est*', quod crist and comsede for to swoune.
> Pitousliche and pale, as a prison þat deieþ,
> The lord of lif and of light þo leide hise eighen togideres.
> The day for drede wiþdrouȝ and derk bicam þe sonne;
> (XVIII. 57-60).

The hypermetric lines well accord with the solemnity of the occasion. Other passages, such as the debate of the Four Daughters of God (XVIII. 113 ff.), also rivet the attention.

In a manner reminiscent of the mystery drama cycles, Langland throughout this passus combines the Scriptural account of the Passion with legendary or cultural expansions from popular medieval piety. From the Scriptures he draws the trial before Pilate and the cry of the Jews "Crucify him!" From the same source come the death on the cross itself and the wound in the Lord's side. These details are supplemented by such things as the description of Christ as a young knight hastening to do battle with evil (cf. *The Dream of the Rood*), the scenes in Hell, and the characterization of Longinus as a blind knight forced

into stabbing the body of Christ (XVIII. 78-91). This last detail may provide some indication of the direction of ecclesiastical influence upon Langland, for Bloomfield traces the popularity of the story to its use by medieval monks, who claimed Longinus as an originator of monasticism.[1] It may also be noted that Langland presents Satan and Lucifer as two distinct persons, as does the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.[2]

The story is that of Christ from the Gospels, but it is permeated by the atmosphere and understanding of the medieval Church. A minor example of this is provided by Christ's description of Satan in Eden as "a Lusard wiþ a lady visage" (XVIII. 337). Skeat says in a note on this line:

> The words lizard and lady refer to the fact that the serpent who tempted Eve was sometimes represented with short feet, like a lizard or crocodile, and the face of a young maiden. Even when the feet do not appear, the face is commonly retained, as in the chapter-house of Salisbury Cathedral.[3]

We have here, then, an intriguing bit of "stained glass theology," but the medieval Church's influence on Passus

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[1]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 73. Bloomfield also notes a similar use of the story by Langland's contemporary, the Benedictine Bishop of Rochester, Thomas Brinton (Sermon 37).

[2]Goodridge, p. 308, n. 22. Skeat, II, 258, notes that the roles of Satan and Lucifer are here reversed, however.

[3]Skeat, II, 261. Skeat also notes other uses of the same form, e.g., in the Coventry and Chester mystery cycles and in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale, line 360 (Robinson's edition, p. 66).

XVIII extends far deeper than that. As Goodridge notes, the structure and expression of the passage gives a "speaking picture" of the Liturgy for Holy Week, especially that for Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.[4] Antiphons and hymns from those services ring through the story as it progresses, Christ stands before the gates of Hell like a Paschal candle, and the passus concludes with a summons to the adoration of the cross.[5]

Langland also evidences an awareness and utilization of traditional understandings of the atonement. That is, all Christians agreed that salvation was through the death of Christ—but how exactly did the cross effect this release? An older view, called the "Ransom Theory," held that because of man's sin the devil had a legal right to men's souls, and that the death of the eternal Christ was a "payment in full" for all men forever. This view frequently included a "tricking" of the devil into accepting the soul of Christ, thus revenging the original tricking of Satan himself. A second theory, which became the usual expression of Western Christendom, likewise saw the death of Christ as a payment for sin, but this time the payment was to God, not Satan. God's Justice demanded death as punishment for sin, but his mercy wished men to be saved. By suffering

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[4]Goodridge, p. 307.

[5]Cf. Goodridge, pp. 307, n. 6; 308, nn. 13, 15, 17, 21; 309, nn. 43, 45, 47.

death himself, the sinless Christ paid the debt for all men. A third theory, the "Moral Influence Theory," saw the death of Christ not so much as a "payment," but as the supreme expression of God's love, an expression powerful enough to awaken the love of sinful man for God in return. As noted above, the second theory, that of "Substitutionary Atonement" had become the "usual" explanation, but all three theories were "orthodox," and each appears often in Christian writings according to the predilections of the author.

Langland, with his encyclopedic cast of mind, typically employs all three of these ecclesiastical understandings of the Passion of Christ. Lucifer gives voice to the Ransom Theory (XVIII. 277-85), and Christ Himself tells Satan that He is giving him his soul as lawful payment (amendes) for the salvation of men (XVIII. 327). Yet the poet does not see the redemption only as a deal between God and the Devil, and he lays great stress on the fact that through the death of the perfect Christ, God has reconciled the great dilemma of divine Justice and Mercy, of Law and forgiveness (XVIII. 342 ff.), an echo of the Substitutionary Atonement theory. One may also find something of the Moral Influence theory in the next passus, where Will is told that Christ appears before men with his cross to inspire men to resist the temptations of sin (XIX. 63-68).

In view of all of these "churchly" elements which color Langland's portrayal of the Passion, it is quite

natural that in the action of the poem this scene should inspire Will to go to Mass. It is quite fitting too that this great vision of Christ leads directly to the founding of the Church, the vehicle through which the Passion is to be proclaimed to men. As was seen in the Visio, Langland realized that the ideal of Christianity must be given concrete expression in the world, not only for the individual, but for the human community as well.[6] As Lawlor observes:

> The perfection the Dreamer sought, brushing aside in his impetuous fashion all proximate goods, has at last been revealed in Incarnate Deity; and we have ended with the mighty implications of the Saviour's fulfilment of Law—implications which reach beyond Calvary and the Harrowing of Hell to the Day of Judgment, the end of recorded time. We are now to seek its application in the long interim between the first Easter Morning and the last Day. It is to the right ordering of the Church that the poet now returns. . . .
>
> The completeness of what has been revealed in the previous vision is one thing. Now there must be a return to the real world, where the purposes of God are to be carried out in the enactments of the church's ritual and in men's daily lives.[7]

As Passus XIX opens, Will hastens to Mass and falls asleep again. This may strike some readers as a slightly comic anti-ecclesiastical touch,[8] but if it is recalled that in Piers Plowman the Dreamer's sleep betokens not bodily rest but an awakening to spiritual insight and

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[6]Cf. Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 4; Frank, p. 94; Carruthers, pp. 149-50.

[7]Lawlor, pp. 171-72.

[8]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 128.

realization, it proves to be a master stroke that Will receives his great vision of the founding of the Church on earth at the mid-point of that Church's most sacred service of worship. In this vision, following Conscience's explanation of the name "Christ" in terms of a King and Conqueror,[9] Christ appears to the apostles, especially Thomas, who will not believe until he has seen. This leads directly to the establishing of the institution which is to proclaim Christ so that all men may behold Truth:

> And whan þis dede was doon do best he [þouȝte],
> And yaf Piers [pardon, and power] he grauntede hym,
> [Myght [men] to assoille of alle manere synne[s],
> To alle maner men mercy and forȝifnesse]
> In couenaunt þat þei come and knewelich[e] to paie
> To Piers pardon þe Plowman redde quod debes.
> Thus haþ Piers power, b[e] his pardon paied,
> To bynde and vnbynde boþe here and elli[s], . . .
> (XIX. 182-89).

Having committed the dispensing of the forgiveness he had won for men to Piers and the Church, Christ ascends to heaven (XIX. 191 f.), and next is presented the day of Pentecost (XIX. 200 ff.). On this day the Church received the power and grace of the Holy Spirit to enable it to continue the reconciling ministry of Christ on earth. Piers is given four oxen, the Gospels, with which to plow his field (XIX. 262 ff.). To these are added four "stottis"

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[9]Goodridge, p. 310, n. 3; observes that these titles form the focus of the Church's liturgy in Eastertide.

(bullocks),[10] the four Doctors of the Latin Church: Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory, and Jerome. These are to harrow the field with the Old and New Testaments, i.e., to explain the Scriptures and teach faith to the people (XIX. 267-73). Piers is also given the "seeds" of the four Cardinal Virtues to sow in the hearts of men (XIX. 274 ff.), and this great vision of the founding of the Church culminates in the construction of a barn to hold Piers' harvest, a barn whose foundation is the Baptism and sacrificial death of Christ, and whose roof is the Scriptures (XIX. 319-27): "And called þat hous vnitee, holy chirche on englissh." (XIX. 328). Grace also gives Piers a cart called "cristendom" to convey the harvest to "Unity," the two horses of "contricion and confession" to pull the cart, and "preesthod" to be his "hayward" (XIX. 329-332). All this being accomplished, Grace and Piers go forth to till the world with Truth (XIX. 333).

Throughout this passage it is clear that Piers personifies St. Peter, the first Pope,[11] and that these lines have to do with the founding of the Church as a visible, hierarchical, and sacramental institution. Langland's theology on this point is perfectly orthodox, and it is

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[10]For the definition of the word, see Skeat, II, 269-70.

[11]On this point at least, scholars are in general agreement (cf. Skeat, II, 268; Robertson and Huppé, p. 221), though Frank still prefers to interpret Piers even here as "mankind in its semi-divine aspect," Frank, p. 102.

apparent that it is through this institution that Christ intends that the eternal Faith shall be proclaimed, expounded, and interpreted to men in the world. The most extreme pro-papalist could hardly have presented a higher view of the earthly Church, for Piers is made not only the "plowman" but also the "reve" and the "procurator" of Christ. This last designation is especially suggestive, for while it means "proctor or agent,"[12] it likewise has associations with imperial as well as spiritual authority, for procurator was the term used by the Roman Empire for a provincial governor responsible only to Caesar himself. This is not to say that Langland is here explicitly acknowledging the claim of the papacy to rule the world for Christ in all respects, but within the immediate context of his vision of the founding of the Church this possibility is not rejected, particularly since Christ Himself has just been presented as King and Conqueror.

This passage, then, is the epitome of the "incarnational theology" which has been of such importance since the Dreamer's first encounter with Lady Holy Church in the Visio. From this ideal but somewhat nebulous figure, Langland has progressed through his initial glimpse of Piers as a bridge between heaven and earth to the ultimate indwelling of the temporal by the spiritual, Jesus Christ. This is

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[12]Skeat, II, 418.

the essential point in Piers' role as the manifestation of the divine saving power on earth—the Old Law has been fulfilled in the New; justice and mercy are reconciled in love. This, however, is the climax but not the end of Christ's redemptive activity,[13] and therefore Piers Plowman proceeds to assume a new role, that of Head of the Church on earth. In this visible institution, the grace and truth of God are given corporal expression. Through the sacraments this heavenly truth is to be conveyed to men. The cleansing and atoning death of Christ is applied to men through water, bread and wine, and the forgiveness which He won is apportioned to His followers in the audible words of penance and absolution. In this passus the function of Piers as God's spokesman on earth, hinted at in the Visio, is given definite expression, and Piers' pardon is amplified and validated in Christ.[14] As piers and Conscience go forth into the world in obedience to the command of Christ "to tilie truþe" (XIX. 333), it appears that the difficulties of the poem have reached a resolution, the ideal Church is manifested on earth, and to save one's soul, one has only to make use of the means of grace in the care of Piers (Peter) and his workmen. All is well.[15]

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[13]Frank, pp. 94, 96.

[14]Carruthers, p. 155.

[15]The suggestion of Ames (p. 91) that Piers' going forth shows that "the Truth of the triune God is not and never was confined to the Church" seems to interpret this

Yet Langland does not allow this euphoric state to endure for long. It was said at the outset of this study that Langland sets up an ideal only to deflate it in the next breath. No more poignant example of this fact exists in the poem than in this Passus XIX. Langland provided a presentiment of such a reversal earlier in the midst of his account of the founding of the Church when Grace was distributing his gifts to men (XIX. 219-28). Grace warns that Antichrist will attack the Church, and that even the leaders of the Church may become encumbered with pride and covetousness. These words receive speedy fulfillment when Piers and Conscience go forth to plow. In spite of the warning, it is still something of a shock to the reader, basking in the glory of the first portion of Passus XIX, to read:

> Now is Piers to þe plow; pride it aspide
> And gadered hym a greet Oost; greuen he þynkeþ
> Conscience and alle cristene and Cardinale vertues,
> Blowe hem doun and breke hem and bite atwo þe mores.
> (XIX. 335-38).

In the face of this attack, the Christians take refuge in the stronghold of Unity, and Pride's progress is given a setback (XIX. 364-68). Yet, just as the people of the Visio grew slack in the face of Piers' command to till the half-acre, so now the majority of Christians find even the pardon of Christ, which still says redde quod debes to God

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portion of Passus XIX too much in the light of the poem's ominous last lines.

and man, too demanding (XIX. 391-408). The situation is summarized by a "lewed vicory," an "ignorant vicar" (Goodridge), and in an instant the poem has moved from the apostolic age to the fourteenth century. The corruption related by this priest leads directly to the terrifying last passus of Piers Plowman, which will be the subject of Chapter VIII.

Before progressing to that last passus, however, much remains to be said about the long central portion of the poem which led to Langland's vision of Christ and His Church, including many details of the poet's ecclesiology which provide light for understanding the poem's conclusion. The vicar's description of the ills of the contemporary Church remind the reader that the churchmen whom the Dreamer saw in his travels and visions made it hard for him to come to the magnificent sights of Passus XVIII and XIX. As Robertson and Huppé observe in commenting on the problems of Unity, "The result of this falsehood has been made amply clear in the course of Will's painful struggle to find the Treasure of Truth."[16] As in the Visio, so in the Vita the Church's spokesmen, whatever their status, have more often than not failed to fulfill the role committed to them by Christ and Holy Church.

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[16]Robertson and Huppé, p. 223. See also Frank, p. 81.

Will's difficulties with clerics begin at the outset of the Vita. He has set out on the search for dowel, but can find no one who can help him. At last he encounters two learned friars and puts his question to them. These two worthies immediately reply: "[. . . 'amonges vs he dwelleþ], / And euere haþ as I hope, and euere shal hereafter.'" (VIII. 18-19). Will at this point is not above enjoying a good argument, and disputes the friars' claim. He observes that all men sin daily, and that since sin is evil, and dowel cannot abide with evil, then he cannot always be among the friars (VIII. 20-25). One of the friars answers with a parable designed to show that venial sin is unavoidable but does not prevent the progress of the soul to God. Neither, by implication does it remove dowel from the friars' possession (VIII. 28-56). This explanation does not satisfy Will, and he bids the friars adieu.

This initial encounter with the friars has proved to be of little help to Will. It is an ominous foreboding of the future, for of all clerics the friars, because of their learning and wide experience, should have been able to be of the greatest help to him (VIII. 9, 14-17). In actuality, the parable they quote him is only a commonplace,[17] and as it is here expressed it has only the effect of encouraging complacency rather than spiritual progress. Neither does

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[17]Goodridge, p. 281, n. 4; Skeat, II, 133.

it deal in any way with the remedy for mortal sin in the believer once that sin has been committed. Moreover, although Will is not satisfied with their answer, it still has affected his thinking so that in musing further about dowel, dobet, and dobest, Thought presents him with an "occupational" definition. That is, Will does not accept the assertion that dowel is simply among the friars, but he does consider the possibility that dowel, dobet, and dobest are simply the life of a layman, a member of an order, and a bishop respectively (VIII. 78-99). Even in his present untutored state, Will sees that such an external definition is not sufficient (VIII. 111-14), but the friars have given him no guidance beyond this. Robertson and Huppé find in these two friars figures of corruption,[18] but at this point their teaching seems more superficial than perfidious, partially correct but ignoring essential issues. In any case, the friars of Passus VIII reveal themselves as inadequate guides for the soul of man.

In Passus XI, however, there is an explicit instance of real corruption among the friars (XI. 58-83). This occurs when Will is approaching old age and has mentioned to the friars with whom he has been associating[19] that he prefers to be buried in his parish church rather than that

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[18]Robertson and Huppé, p. 103.

[19]These are not the same friars as those of Passus VIII.

of the friars. When the friars turn against him for this decision it becomes clear to Will that the friars have been interested in him only for his contributions and for the legacy they hope to receive from him after his death. These "wise" spokesmen of the Church, just as Fitzralph and other anti-fraternal writers had charged, have cared all along only for money, and not at all for the soul.

This realization, painful as it is, is but the culmination of a process which began with the friars of Passus VIII. These friars had provided Will with no adequate guidance, and had left him to wander on his own. Accordingly, in Passus IX he has sought to find the correct path through Intelligence alone. Intelligence carries him further than Thought was able to do, but throughout the passus, Intelligence employs only the natural faculties of the mind. These faculties prove inadequate to deal with the redemption of man in his fallen state—Will requires the added illumination of the spirit which only the representatives of Christ can give. It is precisely this "voice of God," speaking through the Church, which is lacking, however. The discourse on marriage which concludes the passus (IX. 110-210) is partly a digression, but in its emphasis on proper "union" as the basis of dowel, it underscores the lack of the union of flesh and spirit, of natural and divine, which is at the heart of Will's problem.

This lack paves the way for the disaster which Will suffers in Passus X. Here, in the furtherance of his quest, he meets Study and Learning (Clergie). Will has not been prepared by the friars and other spokesmen of the Church to deal adequately with these entities, and the encounter nearly results in the abandonment of his spiritual pilgrimage once and for all. In Study's rebuke to Will, there is implied a sad commentary on the theological situation of the times. True study and knowledge, which should lead men to God, are nowhere valued and sought after among the various classes of society. Particularly cited for this abuse are the clergy, including the learned friars (X. 52 ff.), who are totally lacking in love in their ministry. They confuse rather than guide the people; and theology, in spite of its ideal purpose, is a most problematical discipline (X. 185 ff.). It is true that Learning tells Will that dowel is ". . . 'on holy chirche to bileue / Wiþ alle þe articles of þe feiþ þat falleþ to be knowe." (X. 238-39). Immediately following this exposition of simple faith in the teaching of the Church, however, Learning proceeds to berate the regular and secular clergy alike for failing to practice what they preach (X. 272-78), concluding:

> Ac it semeþ now sooþly, to [siȝte of þe worlde],
> That goddes word wercheþ noȝt on [wis] ne on lewed
> But in swich manere as Marc meneþ in þe gospel:
> Dum cecus ducit cecum ambo in foueam cadunt.
> (X. 279-81).

Learning looks forward to a future bettering of this sad situation, but this in no way mitigates the fallen state of the Church at present.

Will, for his part, provides in the last part of this passus a poignant example of the results of such a situation. Like so many in the age of Langland, Will becomes immersed in the labyrinth of speculative predestination (X. 377 ff.). By this point Will is raving, and while he calls the Church the "herberwe" and "goddes hous to saue" (X. 412), he concludes that the contemporary clergy of the institutional Church are like the carpenters who built Noah's ark—they themselves were all lost (X. 413-19). The upshot of his long tirade is that if this corruption is what learning and theology result in, he will reject them entirely.[20] As the passus concludes, he finds little good to say about the Church as an hierarchical organization—the shepherds are more lost than the sheep they are to guide.

So it is that in Passus XI Will has abandoned himself to the seductions of Fortune for forty-five years (XI. 47). He has taken little thought for his soul, and whatever impulse to religion that was left to him he was content to soothe with the easy penance of the friars (XI. 53 ff.). Yet, as old age clutches at him, the friars by their very

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[20]Though the A-Text continues for another passus beyond this point, it is not able to progress beyond this frame of mind.

perversity and cupidity help him awaken once more to the things of the spirit. At last they begin to fulfill something of the function which God and the Church have committed to them, though they do this only in a negative and paradoxical way.

Repulsed by the avaricious friars and their kind, Will is enabled to catch a glimpse of Lewte. This character is variously defined. Skeat translates the name as "Loyalty,"[21] and this is correct, though the explanation and translation provided by Goodridge is particularly instructive:

> Good Faith ('Loyalty') signifies honest living, loyalty to one's moral and social obligations, and the following of Truth as it was first taught to the dreamer by Holy Church.[22]

Lewte is not exclusively a Christian character, for the pagan Trajan could possess it also. Nevertheless, Lewte turns Will's thoughts back to the Church and he recalls the words of Lady Holy Church concerning his baptism (XI. 117 f.; I. 76). He recalls too the all-embracing mercy of God, even as the lostness of his state strikes home to him (XI. 118-36). This much, at least, of the true faith has been preserved in the words, if not in the actions, of the servants of the Church.

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[21]Skeat, II, 167.

[22]Goodridge, p. 288, n. 11.

These matters are brought into sharper focus by the work of Imagination (Ymaginatif) in Passus XII. Imagination is the faculty whereby the Dreamer may begin to bring the results of past experience into order and balance. Through his efforts Will is at last able to see that his earlier rejection of learning was too hasty—learning properly used can be of great value to the Church and to the individual Christian (XII. 70 ff.). In this more mellow mood, Will is also willing to listen to Imagination's explanation that Christendom, the Church, is

> . . . þe cofre of cristes tresor, and clerkes kepe
> þe keyes
> To vnloken it at hir likyng, and to þe lewed peple
> 3yue mercy for hire mysdedes, if men it wole aske
> Buxomliche and benigneliche and bidden it of grace.
> (XI. 109-12).

This ideal, however, is no sooner stated than it too is deflated, for the clergy, including the ubiquitous friars, sadly fail to fulfill this task of distributing the riches of God. This time, however, Will is not left in total despair, for he can value the good that remains in the teaching of the Church. At the same time, he comes to realize that he must use his own powers and learning to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the inadequate representatives of the Church (XII. 177 ff.; also X. 277). The hierarchical Church is not totally rejected, but in large part Will is left to "work out his own salvation," using

the resources of the organizational Church when he can, but going beyond them when he must.

Dismal memories trouble the Dreamer as Passus XIII opens, for he recalls his adventures with Fortune, Old Age, and the avaricious friars. The failure of the institutional Church is again underscored, for he likewise recalls:

> . . . how þis Coueitise ouercom clerkes and preestes;
> And how þat lewed men ben lad, but oure lord hem helpe,
> Thoruȝ vnkonnynge curatours to incurable peynes;
> (XIII. 11-13).

As described here, the institutional Church is more a vehicle of damnation than of salvation. Indeed, in the learned Master of Divinity[23] at Clergy's Feast, Will encounters in this passus a figure who stands as the epitome of the failures of the hierarchical Church (XIII. 25 ff.). The B-Text implies, and the C-Text explicitly states, that the reader is to envision this worthy as a friar ("C," XVI, 30).[24] Conscience receives this theologian with respect, but Will is disgusted by the Master's gluttonous devouring of dainty foods while he and Patience are fed sparingly on courser fare. Will would berate the hypocrite, but Patience urges him to keep still, letting nature take its own revenge for

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[23] In XIII. 82 he is referred to as a "doctor," but the parallel passage in "C" (XVI. 90) again has "maister." "C" does call him "doctor" in XVI. 85, so presumably either title is applicable. Both are used in the sense of "learned teacher." See Skeat, II, 190-91, notes to lines 30 and 65.

[24] Cf. Skeat, II, 189.

such gluttony (XIII. 86 ff.). Will bides his time, and eventually gets to ask the Master Friar his recurring question about dowel. Will then berates him for failing to follow his opinion. Here Piers the Plowman is mentioned for the first time in the Vita (XIII. 124), and he is quoted as rejecting all knowledge except love. This, of course, is the one thing the Master Friar, for all his learning, was lacking. Conscience does not fully understand this teaching, but he has supreme confidence in Piers (XIII. 131 f.). He will let the issue rest "til Piers come and preue þis in dede" (XIII. 133). After further discussion, Conscience and Patience leave the Friar behind, resolved to seek a truer knowledge in experience (XIII. 179-82).

The importance of this scene has been noted by numerous scholars.[25] Lawlor comes close to the core of the issue when he says

> . . . in a voluble but greedy theologian of the dinner-table we see a final discrepancy between theory and practice. . . . Here are combined in one figure those two vices which underlay all others in Visio and Vita—self-interest in the one and heartless learning in the other.[26]

This observation may be expanded to say that in the person of the Master Friar, Langland presents in most graphic terms

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[25]See, e.g., Frank, pp. 68-71; Carruthers, pp. 109-14.

[26]Lawlor, pp. 118-19.

the dichotomy between what the Church should be, and what it too often is. It is especially significant that in the B-Text, Piers is mentioned here, and in the C-Text (XVI. 138-48) he actually appears for a brief statement. In both versions Piers' contrast to the hypocritical friar is self-evident. Whether Donaldson is correct in seeing Piers in this passus as still an Old Testament figure of the patient waiting for Christ,[27] or whether, in line with a more general reading of him as the personification of God's saving work in history, he stands here as a sort of "righteous remnant" of truth within the corrupt Church, the specious theologizing of the Master Friar stands condemned. As is seen throughout the encounter with Haukyn (Activa Vita) with which the passus concludes, the common people fall and will have to answer for their sin—but the representatives of the hierarchical Church on earth have done little to bring them to repentance. As Lawlor notes,[28] this is not a total rejection of the Church, and in Passus XIV the repentance of Haukyn is conducted along the quite orthodox lines of sacramental theology. At the same time, a very real issue has been raised concerning the actual ability of the corporate Church in discharging its God-given obligations. Too often one's religion and commitment to

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[27]Donaldson, C-Text, p. 180.

[28]Lawlor, p. 123.

God are allowed to be engraved only on friary windows rather than on the heart (XIV. 196-200).

Passus XV, which stands as the Prologue to Dobet and contains Anima's discourse on Charity, recapitulates much that has gone before. The passus records progress for the Dreamer, for here he is made ready to see Piers again and to experience a vision of the Tree of Charity which will prepare him for Faith, Hope and the supreme vision of Love still to come. For all this, in this passus there is as much concerning the failure of the Church as there is about its ideal. Idle theologians who lead laymen astray are again rebuked (XV. 70-72) and the real dilemma of the Church is given powerful expression:

> As holynesse and honeste out of holy chirche [sprynge þ]
> Thoruȝ lele libbynge men þat goddes lawe techen,
> Right so out of holi chirche alle yueles [spredeþ]
> There inparfit preesthode is, prechours and techeris.
> (XV. 92-95).

This gives rise to the most crucial of questions: Is the Church still the Church?—and if so, then in what sense is it the Church? Piers is here equated with love and Christ, "Petrus, id est, christus" (XV. 212), but it is made abundantly clear that Piers is an entity far beyond the visible priesthood in and of itself. Indeed, when the Dreamer assumes that the priests can lead him to Christ, he is explicitly told that this is not sufficient (XV. 197-200). Examples of the Church's true manifestation of Christ are

cited (XV. 220 ff.), but these concern the past. The present hierarchy is characterized in quite different terms (XV. 244-48). The hope for reform which immediately follows is but a hope, and it is only as a reflection within himself that Will has been able to gain any glimpse of Christ (XV. 162), not in the Church which is supposed to be his mystical body on earth. Even taking this statement as hyperbole, the status of the hierarchical Church is hardly enhanced. The leaders of the Church have the potential to be the equals of the Apostles (XV. 417 ff.), but this potential remains sadly unrealized. If Piers is the representative of Christ on earth, his relation to the organizational ecclesiastical body, while not explicitly denied, is nevertheless exceedingly ambiguous.

Ambiguity indeed characterizes the treatment of the Church throughout the Vita of Dowel and the Prologue to Dobet. The true teaching and learning of the Church is greatly prized, but the leadership of the Church, from the pope down to the parish priest, is severely chastised on countless occasions. The friars come in for the hardest treatment, but the curia, bishops, canons, monks, and all the rest of the clergy receive their share of blame from beginning to end of this segment of the poem. Such progress as the Dreamer is enabled to make is more in spite of than a result of the organizational Church and its hierarchy. The corporate hierarchical Church emerges as just

as great a part of the Dreamer's problem as any worldly temptation or inner perversity.

With all this in mind, the wonder is not that it takes Will so long to come to the great vision of Christ and the Church with which this chapter opened. Rather, it is amazing that he is able to come to it at all. In spite of his dependence on a rock such as Augustine (cf. X. 120; XIV. 319 and passim) or his great use of very orthodox and at times Thomistic vocabulary,[29] a great part of his problem here and elsewhere is in learning to distinguish the true from the false, within the Church as well as without it.[30] As such, his state at times reminds one of the predicament of an extreme Ockhamist logician who can believe nothing for certain, barring a leap of blind faith, a leap which may as easily be in the wrong as the right direction. God may not deceive in the world of Langland, but His spokesmen so mix truth with falsehoood that the way to Truth is a dim path indeed.

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[29]Hort, p. 93.

[30]Robertson and Huppé, p. 223.

CHAPTER VII

LANGLAND AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

The two preceding chapters have established the importance of questions concerning the nature, function, and identity of the Church in Piers Plowman. These chapters have also shown something of the difficulty the poet faced in dealing with these issues and in coming to definite conclusions about them. A tension has been noted between Langland's high ideal and respect for the Church and his disgust at the corruption which everywhere pervaded it. Throughout this discussion, elements have been introduced which recall earlier chapters of this study dealing with the currents of fourteenth century ecclesiology. It is the task of this present chapter to bring these associations into sharper focus and to trace specific strands of the various ecclesiological positions within the framework and art of the poem.

At the outset, I must emphasize again that this is not an attempt to establish the specific sources by volume, chapter, and verse which Langland drew upon for the composition of his own work. It is generally recognized that Langland consulted the Bible, the Breviary, and was familiar

with various statements of certain Fathers of the Church.[1] Beyond this, a search for absolutely definite sources is almost bound to be inconclusive.[2] Knowledge of a specific theologian's position, even a citing of his words, is not proof of a first-hand knowledge of his writings themselves. As an earlier chapter has shown, ecclesiological topics had become popular topics of conversation in Langland's day and these issues were bandied about in both written and oral form. Further researches may indeed provide additional information on specific influences, but this dissertation is restricted to a consideration of these positions and conflicts as they appear in Piers Plowman, wherever or however Langland may have encountered them.

The ambiguities of Langland's attitude toward the Church, which might be described as a "love/hate relationship," causes very real tensions and problems for the reader of Piers Plowman. Time and again Will turns to the Church's representatives for guidance, and accepts with gladness the theological pronouncements of the Church. Such passages seem to promise that here at last is a solution to the Dreamer's dilemma—but inevitably this feeling of resolution is shattered by ringing denunciations of the visible Church delivered suddenly and with little warning.

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[1]Hort, pp. 47-54.

[2]Bloomfield, "Present State of PP Studies," Speculum, 14 (1939), 225.

The concluding two passus of the poem offer the most spectacular example of such reversals, but they are in fact of a piece with the ups and downs which chart the uneasy progress of the Vita and the Visio as well. Some readers may be inclined to attribute such incongruences to slack art and chaotic organization on the part of the author. This, however, is too simplistic an explanation, especially as these issues touch upon the success or failure of the Dreamer's quest, which is at the heart of the poem.

One may begin to understand something of the heterogeneous nature of Langland's statements on the Church by recalling the ecclesiastical tenor of the times in which Piers Plowman was written. An earlier chapter has established that in the fourteenth century the great age of theological synthesis was past, and that widely divergent views concerning the nature, authority, and function of the Church had gained wide currency. As often as not, such views were not urged in opposition to an "official" Catholic position, but were themselves vying for acceptance from the Church at large as it sought to understand itself. Most importantly, the fourteenth century, particularly in its latter decades, was an exceptionally eclectic age wherein each person borrowed freely from numerous, and often contradictory, schools of thought. Given the nature of the fourteenth century ecclesiological situation, it should come as no surprise that a work which deals with the Church

in detail might present scholars with difficulty in assigning it to a neat and specific cubby-hole of thought.

Langland, as he reveals himself in his poem, is a true son of his eclectic times. He is extremely receptive to the various streams of thought which swirled around him. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that he is merely playing with all these ideas, or that he is merely taking delight in setting up and blowing over straw men to bedevil the reader. The totality of the poem reveals that he is in dead earnest as he seeks to grapple with these often mutually exclusive positions. He is not able to accept half-answers, but at the same time, he does not attain the unity of perspective which enabled Dante to incorporate similar ecclesiological problems into a harmonious whole in the Commedia. Like Chaucer he can see the ideal and the failure of the Church, but even more than his great contemporary, Langland must wrestle with this paradox and its numerous dependent issues within the inmost depths of his being. The answers which satisfied Gower do not necessarily satisfy Langland. In the course of this struggle he touches on and accepts part of many of the ecclesiological positions which filled his age. He tries out and exposes the weaknesses of various possibilities, not in the orderly sed contras of an Aquinas, but with the urgency of a fourteenth century Christian striving for his own synthesis as he seeks to answer the all important question "How may I save my soul?"

To appreciate this fact more fully, the various ecclesiological positions which Langland employs must be sorted out, and at the same time an attempt must be made to see how these positions affect the movement of the poem as discussed in the previous chapters.

Throughout Piers Plowman one finds passages which well accord with the positions of those who saw the visible Church as God's authoritative spokesman on earth. As was established in the chapter on the Visio, Lady Holy Church stands as a sort of ideal figure, a sponsa immaculata which St. Augustine would have had little trouble in recognizing in his vision of the pure heavenly Church. Indeed, when speaking of the Church as an ideal, St. Augustine was fond of likening the Church to a pure and beautiful virgin with marked similarity to the Virgin Mary:

> Hic est speciosus forma prae filiis hominum (Psal. XLIV, 3), sanctae filius Mariae, sanctae sponsus Ecclesiae, quam suae genitrici similem reddidit: nam et nobis eam matrem fecit, et virginem sibi custodit.[3]

It will be noted that for Augustine, as for Langland, this figure of the Church is at one and the same time virginal and maternal. Yet, St. Augustine in his polemical writings against the schismatics of his day always insisted that it was through the hierarchical and institutional Catholic

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[3]Sermon 195, sec. 2 (Migne, PL, 38:1018). For similar imagery see also Sermon 192, Ch. 2 (Migne, PL, 38:1012-13); Sermon 213, Ch. 7 (Migne, PL, 38:1063-64).

Church that this ideal Church was to be made operative in the world of men. Through the "reflection" of the ideal Church on earth men were to be led upwards to the realm of the spirit.[4] It was just such a premise which set the action of Piers Plowman into motion as the Dreamer was directed to turn his gaze to the figures of the physical world in order to commence his pilgrimage to the Tower of Truth. This is an affirmation of the "incarnational theology" of Augustine and Christian tradition which insists that the perfect and changeless God manifests his saving activity through earthly forms, and Piers himself stands as the prime personification of this truth. Indeed, Piers as he is always a plowman and at the same time something more, bears a distinct relationship to the Augustinian view of the Church as an earthly, but nevertheless divine entity. For Langland, as for Augustine, the ideal and the temporal are inextricably linked. Man is not to trust to his physical nature alone (I. 38-39), but salvation is won by Christ "in the Word made flesh," in "Piers' armes" (V. 500-01; XVIII. 22), and His ministry of forgiveness is to be continued by the Church on earth (XIX. 183-84). So it is that Langland turns repeatedly to Augustine as a trustworthy

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[4] De Doctrina Christiana (Migne, PL, 34:15 ff.). See esp. Book I, Chs. 11-12; Book III, Chs. 9-10. See also Sermon 239, Ch. 1 (Migne, PL, 38:1127), where the "visible" nature of the divine institution is expressly affirmed. For polemical writings, see Migne, PL, 43.

expositor of the truth which he is seeking (e.g., X. 120, 249), and it is significant that the concept redde quod debes which plays such an important role in the conclusion of the poem (XIX. 187) is based directly on a quotation of the Bishop of Hippo: "Non dimittitur peccatum donec restituatur [a]blatum" (V. 273).[5]

Supplementing such Augustinian passages one may also find in the poem echoes, at least indirect ones, of a Thomistic approach. A case in point is Anima's self-description near the beginning of Passus XV. As Hort observes,[6] the passage begins in an Augustinian manner, but by its conclusion has shifted to a more Aristotelian Thomistic stance, a development which is not all surprising given the eclectic nature of fourteenth century philosophy and Aquinas' own use of Augustine as a prime authority. A careful search of the poem might reveal similar examples of Aquinas' influence, but for the present it seems better to concentrate on more general matters of attitude, especially as it is extremely unlikely that Langland ever held a copy of the Summa in his hands. Throughout Piers Plowman, however, there is a use and understanding of the medieval sacramental system as it was classified and refined by such men as Lombard and Aquinas (e.g., XIV. 184 ff.; XIX. 385 ff.).

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[5]Augustine, Epistles, cliii, sec. 20. See Goodridge, p. 273, n. 22.

[6]Hort, pp. 93-94.

Again like Aquinas, Langland focuses primary attention on the sacraments of baptism, the Eucharist, and Penance, as being those which touch most directly on the salvation of all Christians.[7] Langland also evidences an appreciation and longing for the neat and orderly view of the Church and its role in salvation which Aquinas was able to achieve, and within the poem he looks to the hierarchy as the proper leaders of the faithful in spite of their human failings (XV. 417 ff., 609 ff.).[8] Indeed, when Langland is speaking of things as they should be, he gives voice to sentiments of which an ardent pro-papalist could approve. Piers himself on more than one occasion is given a definite papal association, and God's faithful vicar should exercise authority over all men:

> And þow Conscience in kynges court, and sholdest neuere come þennes;
> And Grace þat þow gr[e]dest so of, gyour of alle clerkes;
> And Piers [þe Plowman] wiþ his newe plow and [þe] olde Emperour of al þe world, þat alle men were cristene.
> (XIX. 424-27).

Unfortunately, his sad experience of the actual "inparfit" (XIX. 428) holders of Church office precludes a simple acceptance of such easy solutions.

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[7] Summa Theologiae, Part III, qq. 66-90.

[8] See Summa Theologiae, Part III, q. 64, which discusses the validity of the ministrations of unworthy ministers.

These practical and moral difficulties with the visible Church which many other writers had experienced are compounded for Langland by intellectual complications. Langland, of course, lived in the aftermath of Ockham, and this was a period of general uncertainty in ecclesiological formulations. Langland himself gives poignant expression to the anxieties suffered by men in such a time when the world and everything in it seemed lost in chaos. Not only are the minds of men confused, but the natural and predictable order of the universe is upset:

> Wederwise shipmen and witty clerkes also
> Han no bileue to þe lifte ne to þe [lodesterre].
> . . . . . .
> Neiþer þei konneþ ne knoweþ oon cours bifore anoþer.
> (XV. 357-58, 369).

Those who should know the most, actually know the least (XV. 373-84), and the common folk are left with very unsteady guides.

As for Ockham himself, Langland does not refer to him by name, though he comes naturally to mind in a passage such as XI. 219 ff., where man is warned that human logic is a poor substitute for faith and love. Such logic moves in a different realm from the saints who serve as the Christians' guides and examples. The reader will recall that Ockham, at least as his thought was developed by his radical followers, had reduced theology itself to little more than a game of logic. Such passages are therefore

opposed to the results, if not to the person and intentions of Ockham. There is also little in Piers Plowman to connect Langland directly with the nominalistic philosophy of Ockham, though Langland's thoroughgoing concern with the concrete world and its moral and social problems might be said to verge on an Ockhamistic position, at least as this concern ensures that Langland will not allow himself to become absorbed only in the realm of abstract ideals.[9]

Nevertheless, one hears a clear reaction to the turmoil stirred up by Ockham, his followers, and opponents in the numerous passages in Piers Plowman which express a deep-seated distrust of subtle theologians. Such false ecclesiastics misguide the faithful by their specious theologizing and obscure the true teaching of the Church, causing Langland to denounce them throughout the Vita. It is perhaps a coincidence that Ockham himself was a friar like many of these false theologians mentioned in the poem. At the same time, Langland certainly makes the friars the chief representatives of this problem because of their well-known passion for academic learning and discussion, areas in which Ockham himself excelled. In any case, it is reported that

> Clerkes and [kete] men carpen of god faste
> And haue hym muche in [hire] mouþ, ac meene men in herte.

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[9]See above, pp. 44-45.

> Freres and faitours han founde [vp] swiche questions
> To plese wiþ proude men syn þe pestilence tyme;
> And prechen at Seint Poules, for pure enuye of clerkes,
> That folk is noȝt fermed in þe feiþ ne free of hire goodes
> Ne sory for hire synnes; . . . (X. 70-76).

Such attitudes have infected the speech of laymen as well (X. 104-06), and theology itself can only be characterized as a most problematical discipline (X. 185). This failure of the Church's scholars to offer practical guidance to the seeker of salvation plays a great role in Will's denunciation of all learning (X. 449), an attitude which brings the A-Text of Piers Plowman to a halting and unsatisfying conclusion.

In the B-Text, Will is gradually able to go beyond this position, but the progress is slow indeed. Imagination tells him that he fell because he tried like Adam to know too much (XI. 417). Like much of the theology of Langland's day, Will in trying to know all things has come close to being sure of nothing. Imagination must remind Will that it is grace, not learning, which leads to a true knowledge of God (XII. 68-69), and here again a like failure was prevalent in fourteenth century ecclesiastical writings in the aftermath of Ockham. Grace had become a nebulous term, often incapable of definition or appreciation.[10] Langland himself is at times driven to an almost Ockhamistic

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[10]See above, p. 85.

use of God's potentia absoluta to explain why some are saved and others are lost (XII. 214 ff.), but his basic attitude towards learned but useless theologizing by churchmen is given poignant expression in his picture of the Master friar at Clergy's feast in Passus XIII. Will does finally manage to come to an appreciation of the proper use of learning in the Church, but even so, Anima must still warn against the harmful theological climate in terms reminiscent of Passus X:

> Freres and fele oþere maistres þat to [þe] lewed
> [folk] prechen,
> Ye moeuen materes vnmesurable to tellen of þe Trinite
> That [lome] þe lewed peple of hir bileue doute.
> (XV. 70-72).

Laymen would be aided far more if churchmen would teach the basic truths of religion (XV. 73 ff.), but these are the very things which are ignored.[11]

All these details in the Vita serve to build on the qualifications made by Theology to the teaching of Lady Holy Church which were seen in the Visio.[12] The end result

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[11]Augustine in Sermon 214 (Migne, PL, 38:1065-72), esp. in Chs. 1-2 and the Conclusion, speaks of the importance of knowing the basic doctrines of the faith, and states that a prime obligation of the clergy is to teach these things to the people. Wycliffe, in particular, railed at the modern "subtleties" which passed for religion in place of basic Christian doctrine. See "On the Pastoral Office," pp. 51-53; Sermones, ed. Johann Loserth (London: Wyclif Society, 1890), IV, 242; "De Religione Privata," in Polemical Works, II, 527-28.

[12]See above, p. 187.

is a confirmation of the "prophecy" of Arrogance "That Conscience shal noȝt knowe who is cristene or heþene" (XIX. 348). These words in context have to do specifically with the sacrament of penance, but the "Sophistrie" of Arrogance and Pride in question here proves to have its able workmen in the "theologians" of the Church itself.

In the light of such developments, the earlier words of Learning take on frightening significance:

> Ac it semeþ now sooþly, to [siȝte of þe worlde],
> That goddes word wercheþ noȝt on [wis] ne on lewed
> But in swich manere as Marc meneþ in þe gospel:
> Dum cecus ducit cecum ambo in foueam cadunt.
> (X. 279-81).[13]

For the greater part of the poem Will is indeed "blind," and his blindness is fully equaled by the clerical figures who should be his guides. He is therefore left to wander as best he can among the various issues and debates which filled the ecclesiological writings of the period. In the course of these wanderings both Will and the reader are faced with several alternative understandings of the Church.

Some scholars, of whom Edward Vasta may stand as a prime example,[14] have seen Piers Plowman as essentially a

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[13]The scriptural reference is actually to Matthew 15: 14. Wycliffe also employs this verse in characterizing the leadership of the Church in his day. See De Simonia, ed. M. H. Dziewicki (London: Wyclif Society, 1898), p. 66.

[14]The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

mystic work whose real concern is with "the real but supernatural union between the soul, with its powers of knowledge and love, and God."[15] Still, in spite of the fact that Vasta asserts throughout his work that he has discovered in mysticism the "central concern" of Piers Plowman, and that other approaches deal only with specific themes or aspects of various parts of the poem; even he must reckon with Langland's dogged clinging to the issues of the physical world in the course of his "mystic" flight.[16] Elizabeth Salter offers a more balanced view, for while she appreciates the earthly as well as the ethereal elements of Will's quest:

> It is Langland's peculiar distinction that, at one and the same time, he can keep us fully in touch with the great metaphysical consequences of human existence and with the tangible realities of our humorous, corrupt, frustrating and yet desirable life on earth.[17]

In her discussion of the poem's mysticism, Salter offers valuable insight concerning similarities between Langland and the great fourteenth century English mystics such as Walter Hilton and Dame Julian of Norwich who likewise never forgot or belittled the role of the Church on earth as they

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[15]Vasta, p. 13, quoting David Knowles' definition of Mysticism in The English Mystical Tradition (New York: n.p. 1961), p. 21.

[16]Vasta, p. 20.

[17]Elizabeth Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 2.

sought union with the Divine.[18] So it is that however much of a mystic influence the individual reader of Piers Plowman may detect in the poem, Langland's English mystic contemporaries direct him, if at all, not away from but rather towards a wrestling with the problems of the nature of the Church in this world. Langland writes not for an ascetic elite, but for those who would tread the way of salvation in all walks of life.[19]

Given this breadth of Langland's concern, it is not surprising to find Langland grappling with the current question of apostolic poverty not only as it affects the individual but also as it concerns the total institutional Church. An earlier portion of this study has detailed the aspects of this dispute on the place of wealth in the Church which involved monks, friars and eventually the papacy as well. Within Piers Plowman poverty receives its most extended treatment in Passus XIV where Patience explains to Haukyn that Charity dwells with poverty, not among the rich. The poor man suffers much on earth, but this is a blessing in disguise since the deadly sins have fewer means to capture him than in the case of the rich who

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[18]Salter, Introduction, pp. 85-105. Also see Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church (New York: Shocken Books, 1964), pp. 110-32, esp. 113-14, 122-24, 132.

[19]Salter, Introduction, p. 87. In a sense, of course, Langland does write for an elite, i.e., those who have the education to read and comprehend his poem.

are often deluded by their possessions into taking their heaven here on earth. Having enjoyed paradise in this life, they suffer only torment in the next. It is also significant that throughout this passus wealth is associated with pride, which Langland and medieval theology in general consider the root of damning sin (e.g., XIV. 216 ff.).[20] Poverty, however, is associated with patience and humility, the beginning of the road to God.[21] Within the structure of the poem this is certainly the case, for this passus prepares the way for the visions of Faith, Hope and Charity soon to come. These teachings lead once again to problems of the organizational Church, for this discourse on poverty is followed immediately by Passus XV, where the present clergy of the Church are berated for their failure to follow in the steps of the ancient saints who renounced all for God.

Poverty is clearly seen as superior in itself to possession, for Haukyn asks near the opening of Patience's discourse: "'Wheiþer paciente pouerte . . . be moore plesaunt to oure d[riȝte] / Than richesse riȝtfulliche wonne and resonably despended?'" (XIV. 103-04). Patience's

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[20]See Augustine, De Libero Arbitrio, Ch. 10, sec. 29 (Migne, PL, 32:1286). See also Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Part II, II, qu. 162, arts. 6, 7; qu. 163, arts. 1, 2.

[21]Augustine had likewise extolled humility as a first step on the way to salvation in Sermon 79, Ch. 1, sec. 2 (Migne, PL, 38:441). He had likewise warned of the dangers of riches in De Civitate Dei, IV, 3 (Migne, PL, 41:114), and had explicitly linked riches and pride in Sermon 14 (Migne, PL, 38:112).

response implies an affirmative answer, for he says that he has never seen a rich man who was not afraid of death and the judgment of God (XIV. 106-08). This assumption is given further support by the words of Good Faith (or Scripture?)[22] where Christ Himself is cited as a poor man (XI. 232 ff.). Later in the same passage Christ is portrayed as praising the life of poverty (XI. 255), and the counsel "If you would be perfect, go and sell all you have, and give to the poor" (Matthew 19:21) is specifically cited.[23] These arguments and citations, it will be recalled, are precisely those of the mendicants in the great conflicts over poverty which rocked the fourteenth century Church.[24] Langland himself moves on from these statements to a denunciation of greedy priests, and in the preceding passus the danger of endowments to religious houses is specifically mentioned:

> Litel hadde lordes to doon to ȝyue lond from hire heires
> To Religiouse þat han no rouþe þouȝ it reyne on hir Auters.
> In many places þer þei [persons ben, be þei purely] at ese,
> Of þe pouere haue þei no pite, and þat is hir [pure chartre];
> Ac þei leten hem as lordes, hire lon[d liþ] so brode.
> (X. 317-21).

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[22]The speaker is not clearly identified. See Goodridge, p. 289, n. 23.

[23]Langland attributes this to St. Luke in the text. See Skeat, II, 171.

[24]See above, p. 65. See also Wycliffe, De Ecclesia, pp. 169-73.

Such passages build upon denunciations in the Visio (Prol. 58 ff.; I. 195 ff.) where clerical wealth is decried, and further support Lady Holy Church's characterization of Meed as a thoroughly corrupting influence in the world.

Thus far Langland has seemed to favor the "Spirituals'" vision of a pure and poor Church. This is not, of course, to make of Piers Plowman a Franciscan poem, for throughout the work the friars stand as the epitome of the corruption of their own ideal. At the same time, the poem in other places hangs back from a total denunciation of property. Truth himself instructs the Merchants to "Releue Religion and renten hem bettre" (VII. 33), and Goodridge translates this "assist Religious Orders and give them better endowments."[25] In Passus XI again, in the same speech which so extolled poverty, it is assumed that bishops are to have funds to provide for the adequate though not luxurious support of their clergy (XI. 293). In Passus XIV in spite of other indications to the contrary, it is affirmed that a pious rich man might attain salvation (XIV. 151-52), however rarely such people might be found. Bloomfield also observes that the monks, the possessioners, generally receive better treatment by Langland than do the supposedly more "spiritual" friars.[26] It may be concluded, then, that

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[25]Goodridge, p. 92.

[26]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 71.

Langland does not accept *in toto* the ideal, much less the practice, of the "spiritual" party. His view of the proper relation of the Church to temporal property was strongly influenced by the "spiritual" view, however, and the involvement of the Church in worldly riches remains a major obstacle for Will in the whole course of the poem.

Another of the current ecclesiological problems with which Will must wrestle is that of predestination. This question had been brought to the fore by Bradwardine in response to the Ockhamist challenge[27] which had made the will of God so unknowable and uncertain that it had been effectively removed as an active force in the salvation of men. Bradwardine, in his *De Causa Dei*, had sought to strengthen the position of the Church by asserting the all-pervasiveness of God's will, thereby making the revelation proclaimed by the Church certain and unalterable.[28] This theory, however, was dangerous in ways unforeseen by Bradwardine, for men might recklessly reason that if all is decreed, and one is saved by the arbitrary decision of God, then belief and obedience to the Church have no place in salvation—the Church itself becomes unnecessary. This is exactly the predicament into which Will falls in Passus X when he plunges into matters too deep for him and falls

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[27]See above, pp. 87-90.

[28]See esp. *De Causa Dei*, III, 33-50; Leff, *Bradwardine*, p. 107.

afoul of Scripture. He assumes a fatalistic attitude and declares:

> And þat I man maad was, and my name yentred
> In þe legende of lif longe er I were,
> Or ellis vnwriten for wikkednesse as holy writ witnesseþ:
> Nemo ascendit ad celum nisi qui de celo descendit.
> I leue it wel by oure lord and on no lettrure bettre.
> (X. 380-83).

This leads directly in Passus XI to Will's abandonment of his pilgrimage and his decision to follow Fortune. Recklessness tells him "Homo proponit . . . Deus disponit" and advises him to let God do as he pleases. Man should live his life as he pleases and hope for the best (XI. 35-38). As Goodridge accurately observes: "The predestinarian views expressed by Will have led him into a slothful fatalism."[29] It is only after forty-five years of abandoned living that Will is able to progress beyond this point. Even then, the statement of Scripture that "many are called but few are chosen" (XI. 112 ff.), causes Will great distress: "And in a weer gan I wexe, and wiþ myself to dispute / Wheiþer I were chosen or noȝt chosen, . . ." (XI. 116-17). Now, however, his experiences with Good Faith (Lewte) and Scripture have given him deeper perception, and while he had by no means solved the riddles of predestination he is enabled to recall the invitation of Christ for <u>all</u> to come to Him, and

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[29]Goodridge, p. 287.

the assurance that "He that believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). In this moment he is able to recall with assurance ". . . holi chirche . . . That vnderfonged me atte font for oon of goddes chosene." (XI. 117-18), and is able in the next passus to heed Imagination's advice to leave the deeper mysteries of God's will alone (XII. 214 ff.). So it is that the issue of predestination has nearly led to Will's complete downfall and abandonment of the Church. His dilemma and rash conclusions over this question played a crucial role in his defection which occupies such a large proportion of the time scheme (though not the actual lines) of the poem. How much of this Langland may have derived from Bradwardine himself is uncertain,[30] but contrary to the Bishop's intention, Will has been led away from, not into the Church, by the very means which were supposed to support the Church.

Other problems of ecclesiology, however, cause qualifications for Will's new-found love for Holy Mother Church. The Great Schism, which began in 1378, appalled Langland as much as it did other pious souls. He is aware of the rival factions at Rome and Avignon (XIX. 422-23), and the Master Friar of Passus XIII speaks truer than is his wont when he sees the dispute as practically unsolvable:

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[30]Hort, p. 56, asserts that while Langland may never have read De Causa Dei he would certainly have been familiar with its central ideas at least in summary form.

> Al þe wit of þis world and wiȝt mennes strengþe
> Kan noȝt [parfournen] a pees bitwene [þe pope]
> and hise enemys, . . . (XIII. 173-74).[31]

Langland considers this a serious problem in the Church, for a direct reference to the Schism occurs in Passus XIX, which has portrayed the Church as Unity, the one institution ordained by Christ for the work of salvation. In this passage Langland does not take sides as to which of the contenders for the papal dignity is in the right. His main concern is in the strife the conflict has stirred up in the Christian community, causing the heads of the Church to engage in warfare rather than in healing and reconciling activity (XIX. 428-29). He appears more concerned that some one pope should be found who can restore the Church to its proper course (whoever that might be), an attitude which was to gain increasing acceptance among conciliarists as the century and the Schism dragged on. He does not, however, go into involved theories like those of Cardinal Zabarella[32] whereby the College of Cardinals share in a corporate sense in the authority of the Apostolic See, for the cardinals are presented in a most unfavorable light as being too rapacious to effect any true reform or solution

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[31]Skeat (II, 198) is not certain that these lines refer specifically to the Schism. Goodridge (pp. 294, 312), however, assumes that they do.

[32]Zabarella's positions are given in his De Schismate, Part I. See Ullmann, Origins of the Great Schism, pp. 196-97, 203.

(XIX. 410 ff.). One may, however, hear an echo of the episcopal conciliar party's views,[33] which held that the bishops shared fully in the apostolic authority, in lines such as:

> Bysshopes yblessed, if þei ben as þei sholde
> Legistres of boþe lawes þe lewed þerwiþ to preche,
> And in as muche as þei mowe amenden alle synfulle,
> Arn peres wiþ þe Apostles . . . . (VII. 13-16).

This equality with the apostles is extended in the Vita to all clerics who faithfully fulfill their office in Christ (XV. 417-18). It is not clear in context how much Langland intends these statements to apply to eternal blessedness and how much to earthly jurisdiction, but in any case the clergy of the hierarchical Church so generally fail in following the apostolic ideal that the question becomes academic.

All too prevalent and widespread corruption in the Church causes the introduction into Piers Plowman of other passages which question the necessity of the institutional Church for the salvation of men. The clergy are the most unrighteous of all, and the salvation of most of them is in doubt (X. 405 ff.). More often than not they lead astray rather than guide to heaven. Contrasting sharply with such unworthy shepherds is the righteous pagan Trajan, who in

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[33]See Tierney, Origins, pp. 155-57; Conciliar Theory, p. 181.

spite of never having been a member of the Church while on earth, nevertheless lives eternally in heaven (XI. 140 ff.). It will be recalled that Dante too made use of Trajan, but in his version of the story he had the righteous heathen's specially resurrected soul baptized by Pope Gregory. Langland mentions Gregory (XI. 146) and his part in Trajan's salvation, but goes out of his way to stress the essentially non-ecclesiastical nature of the deed:

> Wiþouten bede biddyng his boone was vnderfongen
> And I saued as ye [may] see, wiþouten syngynge of masses,
> By loue and by lernyng of my lyuynge in truþe;
> Brouȝte me fro bitter peyne þer no biddyng myȝte.
> (XI. 150-53).

These sentiments are confirmed by Imagination in the following passus, where the fact is again stressed that Trajan was never a member of the Church on earth. Indeed, the meaning is extended, for it is said that whoever follows truth, as best he knows, Christian or not, may attain heaven (XII. 280-94).

Such statements call to mind Uthred of Boldon, who sought to give all men a chance at salvation and thus in effect removed the institutional Church as an essential element in coming to God.[34] Langland does not adopt the details of Uthred's clara visio, but his concern that the God of mercy would not damn his children simply because they

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[34]See above, pp. 83-84.

were not part of the corporate and institutional Church is the same. Christ Himself is portrayed as saying:

> And þanne shal I come as a kyng, crouned, wiþ Aungeles,
> And haue out of helle alle mennes soules.
> Fendes and f[e]ndekynes bifore me shul stande
> And be at my biddyng wherso [best] me likeþ.
> A[c] to be merciable to man þanne my kynde [it] askeþ
> For we beþ breþeren of blood, [ac] noȝt in baptisme alle. (XVIII. 371-76).

As with Uthred, this is not universalism in the strictest sense, for man has the power to follow evil as well as truth—but all who desire God shall find Him, membership or lack of it in the Church notwithstanding. Throughout the poem it is the heart of man, not his place in an institution, which makes a person one of the "elect." The strictly churchly and institutional definition of dobest is the weakest and most lacking in depth (VIII. 96 ff.), and the true Church of the faithful is definitely not always synonymous with that of the visible hierarchy (XIX. 223-26).

Langland's statements at times have a Wycliffite ring to them—faced with the same corrupt institution "masquerading" as the Church, the poet was driven to some of the same radical conclusions as the Church reformer. In commenting on the opening sections of Passus VI, which sets forth the ideal society of Piers' "half-acre," Skeat notes that Langland echoes the words of Lord Cobham who maintained "the old threefold division of the church into the Oratores (priests), Bellatores (warriors), and Laboratores

(commons)."[35] Skeat, with less than his usual good judgment, goes on to observe: ". . . and he had no doubt learnt this from Wyclif, who has very similar expressions."[36] Skeat certainly overstates the case here, for this is the traditional division of the estates and such a view of society is hardly unique with Wycliffe. In the age of Langland, however, the proper relation of the three orders of society was a major Wycliffite concern, particularly the duty of the secular lords to "protect" the Church. It is also instructive to note that Wycliffe, like Langland, looked to the solid bedrock of the knights, not the higher nobility, to give expression to his ideal. A similar parallel exists also in Wycliffe's exaltation of the poor and simple priests rather than popes and cardinals as spokesmen for the Church.[37] This naturally brings to mind Langland's "lewed vicory" of the end of Passus XIX, who is one of the few clerical figures of the poem who seems to fulfill his proper role in a concern for souls and expresses an abhorrence at the worldly extravagances of the higher clergy.

Langland's repeated denunciations of clerical abuses parallel those of Wycliffe, though many of his statements,

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[35]Skeat, II, 107.

[36]To support this thesis, Skeat, II, 107, cites Wycliffe's Select English Works, III, 130, 131, 145, 206. See also De Civili Dominio, I, xxiv, 127 ff.

[37]See Trialogus, IV, 15, p. 296; De Blasphemia, p. 166; "On the Pastoral Office," p. 35.

of course, are also echoed by other pious writers throughout the history of the Church. In some passages, however, the relation seems more direct. An example occurs in Passus III, where Conscience tells the King about the corruption Lady Meed causes in the Church. He says:

> [She] may neiȝ as muche do in a Monþe one[s]
> As youre secret seel in sixe score dayes.
> She is pryuee wiþ þe pope, prouisours it knoweþ;
> Sire Symonie and hirselue seleþ [þe] bulles.
> She blesseþ þise Bisshopes [if] þei be lewed;
> Prouendre[s], persones and preestes [she] mayntene þ
> (III. 145-50).

A passage of Wycliffe reads like a commentary and explanation of these lines:

> Also many worldly peyntid clerkis geten the kyngis seel, hym out-wittynge, and senden to Rome for beneficis moche gold; and whanne the king sendith his privey seel for to avaunce goode clerkis, and able bothe of good lif and gret cunnyng to reule, thei bryngen forth hereby many worldly wrecchis, unable to reule o soule for defaute of kunnyng and good lyvyng, and thus usen the kyngis seel ayenst Goddis honour and the kyngis, and profit of Cristen peple, where the kyng understondith to do wel bi here suggestion.[38]

Langland also echoes English objections to the export of large amounts of money to the papal court (IV. 128-33), an issue brought much to the fore by Wycliffe and his supporters of the "court party."[39]

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[38] Select English Works, III, 307. This passage is cited in Skeat, II, 47.

[39] Goodridge, p. 271. See De Simonia, pp. 23, 32, 40, 54-70, 102, 104.

In response to these issues, Wycliffe was able to adapt the current theories of "dominion" in order to give the state the right to correct by force a corrupt Church. Whatever right the Church might have had to temporal possessions was forfeited by abuse, and the state, which was as much a part of the divine order as the Church, had not only the right but also the duty to deprive the Church of "unlawful" possessions. Piers Plowman contains several passages which seem to reflect the influence of Wycliffe in this regard.[40] Early in the poem Reason warns the monks and friars that unless they reform themselves the king will take control of their property (V. 46-47). That it is the duty of the king to act for the true benefit of the Church is emphasized in Passus VIII, where Thought relates that dowel, dobet and dobest (the three orders of society in this case) have chosen one king to rule and protect them all (VIII. 101-10). In Passus X there comes the famous prophecy concerning the forcible divestation of Church wealth, a prophecy which, as Skeat notes, was "so curiously fulfilled in the time of Henry the Eighth."[41] In these lines (X. 322-35) Langland foretells the taking away of the excess wealth which the monks, nuns, canons, and friars have amassed. Robertson and Huppé see this passage as

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[40]For Wycliffe's views, see De Civili Dominio, I, 267; II, viii, 70; De Ecclesia, p. 350 f.; De Simonia, p. 113.

[41]Skeat, II, 69.

apocalyptic, interpreting the "king" as Christ returning in glory, not as an earthly sovereign.[42] The lines certainly have an apocalyptic air about them, and the mysterious reference that before that king comes "Caym shal awake" (X. 334) does fit neatly with the appearance of Antichrist in the final days. Goodridge appreciates these details, and notes that such an interpretation accords with the earlier prophecy (III. 288) concerning the crowning of the "New David."[43] At the same time, Goodridge also recognizes that the other passages cited above, and especially the words of Anima (XV. 554-67) which call upon the nobles to take the "poison" of wealth away from the clergy, "suggest that Langland anticipated the reformation of the monks by an earthly king."[44] As is often the case, deciding exactly what Langland meant in his prophecy is difficult. The words of Anima, however, seem direct enough:

> A medicyne moot þerto þat may amende prelates.
> That sholden preie for þe pees, possession hem letteþ;
> Takeþ hire landes, ye lordes, and leteþ hem lyue by dymes. (XV. 562-64).

It is also significant that near the end of the poem, after the speech of the "lewed vicory," a king appears and asserts his right to take property from both commons and

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[42] Robertson and Huppé, p. 125.

[43] Goodridge, pp. 285-86.

[44] Goodridge, p. 286.

Church for the good of all (XIX. 465-76). To this claim Conscience gives assent, so long that is as the king himself truly uses such property in accord with reason and the common welfare (XIX. 477-79). Langland may not have made it clear when or how this reform was to occur, but in all these "dominion" passages the voice of Wycliffe may be heard in the not too distant background.

Other parallels with Wycliffe might be cited.[45] Among these their joint view of the friars as the chief examples of corruption in the Church offers an obvious example.[46] In more general terms, however, it may be said that both men shared a rigorist and perfectionist view of the Church on earth which could not look with amusement on the failings and foibles of either laymen or clergy. It might not be going too far to say that both, though their thought was firmly based in the Middle Ages, shared in a view of life which was later to develop into the Puritan ethic.

Having recognized some definitely Wycliffite influences in Piers Plowman it is essential to note as well the obstacles to seeing the poem as a Lollard tract. Langland shares many concerns and opinions with Wycliffe, yet he draws back from accepting fully the reformer's conception

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[45]For specific instances see W. P. Palmer, DA, 20 (1959), 1769.

[46]See "De Quattuor Sectis Novellis," in Polemical Works, I, 241-90, esp. pp. 252-56, 285. In the same vol., see also "De Diabolo et Membris Eius," pp. 355-74.

of the Church and its faith. Disgusted by their corruption, Wycliffe came to believe that the papacy, monks, and friars were innately evil and called for their abolition.[47] Langland waxes just as indignant at evil churchmen, but it is the unworthy officeholders, not the offices themselves that he castigates. He can appreciate the ideal of the friars, as personified by St. Francis, even though the modern mendicants lack charity (XV. 230-32). Langland seeks reform, not revolution: "Ac I ne lakke no lif, but lord amende vs alle . . ." (XV. 249). In another passage he denounces the pope for shedding Christian blood, but his prayer is "amende þe pope" (XIX. 442), not "abolish the papacy."

The great medieval sacramental system also remains intact in Langland. Baptism and confirmation are the means for entering the kingdom of God:

> [And] so it fareþ by a barn þat born is of wombe;
> Til it be cristned in cristes name and confermed of
> þe bisshop
> It is heþene as to heueneward and helplees to þe
> soule. (XV. 456-58).

It is true that these sacraments must result in good works for salvation (X. 352-60), but Christ has provided the Eucharist to strengthen men in both faith and works (XIX. 381-90). In spite of this, men will still fall into sin, but the sacrament of penance exists to apply forgiveness.

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[47] De Blasphemia, pp. 14, 46, 166; "De Quattuor Sectis Novellis," Polemical Works, I, 260-69.

In all this, Langland presents a view of the sacraments (at least those necessary for all people in gaining salvation), and the Church's necessary role in their administration, which is compatible, though not so rich in detail, with that of Aquinas in the Summa Theologiae, Part III, qq. 60-90. Langland's words also recall those of Bishop Thomas Brinton, one of whose last official acts was to defend these same sacraments against "Wycliffite errors."[48] It is true that abuses of the sacrament of penance, especially by the friars, are denounced in several places, but the sacrament itself, properly administered and received is highly prized. In Passus XIV. 1-24, for example, Haukyn laments the fact that he always falls into sin again even after receiving absolution from a priest. Conscience then tells him that he will teach him a true way of contrition, a way which affects the heart and not just outward ceremonies, it is true, but which includes, nevertheless, sorrow for sin, confession to "a wis confessour," and satisfaction. Goodridge defines this last as "the performing of the Sacramental Penance that constitutes the third part of the sacrament."[49] Here as elsewhere Langland appears to strive for the proper use of the means of grace in the Church.

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[48]Brinton, Sermons, I, xxxi; II, 462. Langland's statements on the necessity of the sacraments are somewhat qualified, however, by passages such as XVIII. 371-76. See above, p. 251.

[49]Goodridge, p. 296, n. 3.

This attitude is unlike that of Wycliffe, who retained the sacraments, but had in fact placed them in an ambiguous position by his definition of the "true Church" as the "totality of the predestinate" according to the eternal electing will of God. As was established above, Langland dealt with predestination, but rejected it in any causal sense as the basis of the Church and salvation.

In all this, Langland shared with Wycliffe, and was perhaps influenced by him, in denouncing abuses of the institutional Church. He is at times driven nearly to despair by ecclesiastical corruption, but hangs back from breaking as completely with the hierarchical institution as did the Oxford reformer—his faith still retains its medieval Catholic cast. Langland has almost certainly heard the wandering Lollard "poor priests," but with Piers in the Visio, he has his reservations about the instructions of wandering preachers who teach without a bishop's license (VI. 149).[50] Wycliffite elements may certainly be found in Piers Plowman but the ideas of Langland on the Church are not identical with those of Wycliffe.

At this point the reader may be feeling some confusion as to Langland's conception of the Church and its function in his poem. He presents an almost encyclopedic view of

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[50]Skeat, II, 112, and Goodridge, p. 277, n. 9 see this line as a possible direct reference to the Wycliffite preachers.

the entire sweep of fourteenth century ecclesiological positions and theories, but there is great difficulty in reconciling these disparate approaches. It is quite certain that Piers Plowman would be a much simpler and more readily understandable poem if it worked from a consistently pro-papal, or an anti-possessioners, or even a Wycliffite perspective. And yet, while elements of these and other positions appear throughout its course, Piers Plowman cannot be seen as essentially a poetic spokesman for any of these. Langland, in the portions of the poem which have so far been treated, like Bishop Brinton and other moderate reformers, is caught in the middle between his feeling that the visible hierarchical Church ought to be the agent of salvation, the abode of Piers, and the sad realization that the Church in its present state is anything but the "pure body of the elect." This great failure of the institutional Church to reflect its ideal causes doubt as to its real nature, a doubt which the myriad strands of fourteenth century ecclesiology reinforce, but do little to clarify. Yet, in this confusing age, Langland seeks intently, almost too intently, for answers—unlike Chaucer he is not content to note the failure of the organizational Church and then concentrate on the elements of its ideal which are still, however infrequently, realized. He seeks like Dante for a wholeness of vision, but while Aquinas could pick his way through numerous alternatives to the "correct" conclusion,

and while Dante could make use of the Summa to climb the spheres of the Empyrean to the beatific vision, the reader of Piers Plowman may feel that he is being led around in circles from first to last. This result is perplexing, but at the same time intriguing, and by such means Langland the artist whets the desire of his reader to see where the poem's pilgrimage will end.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FINAL QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR PIERS

The circular nature of Piers Plowman with all its heights and depths of ideal and defection, coupled with a continuing struggle with differing views of the Church, helps to explain why the end of the poem is so much like its beginning. Whether one sees the Dreamer's quest as being for salvation, or for the perfection of life which includes that salvation, a central issue of the poem remains which may be expressed in classically Augustinian terms. Granted that an ideal exists to lead men to God, that ideal must ultimately be manifested on earth to be effective. Where then can man turn to find that manifestation—to the institutional Church which so perversely distorts that ideal, or to something else? Is the hierarchical Church still the Church or must man seek an eschatological and reformed Church? Must he even seek a "new" Church altogether? If Piers the Plowman is the personification of God's saving activity on earth, then this search must finally be a search for Piers himself.

In Passus XIX and XX the quest which has filled the poem to this point is far from over. Indeed, the concluding passages of Piers Plowman are in many respects a

reiteration of the issues and frustrations which the Dreamer has encountered all along, and they provide a microscopic summary of the poem as a whole. In Passus XIX, following the founding of the Church, the scene of Piers plowing his field recalls the plowing of Piers' half-acre of the Visio. The reader would do well to heed Bloomfield's caution that these two scenes are linked artistically and not necessarily thematically.[1] Robertson and Huppé probably go too far in their virtual equation of the scenes, interpreting the former in the explicitly ecclesiastical terms of the latter.[2] At the same time, the ideal society of the Church in Passus XIX, like the orderly and rational society of the Visio Passus VI, begins to disintegrate no sooner than it is established. As soon as men are summoned to respond to their proper obligations "the rot sets in," to borrow a phrase from Lawlor.[3] As was seen above, Passus XIX devolves at its end to a catalogue of corruptions, and the society it describes, in spite of the glorious vision of Christ which intervenes, is not noticeably different from that of the Field of Folk in the Prologue.

The Dreamer, it is true, has grown since the opening of the poem, and he is better able to appreciate the

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[1]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 133.

[2]Robertson and Huppé, pp. 90, 221-22.

[3]Lawlor, p. 176.

spiritual as well as the purely moral and logical implications of this defection. Nevertheless, while he may better understand corruption, the finding of answers to it is still a problem. So it is that Passus XX opens on a sombre note with the Dreamer once more a gloomy wanderer: "Heuy chered I yede and elenge in herte. / I ne wiste wher to ete ne at what place, . . ." (XX. 2-3). The hunger which he feels is surely spiritual as well as physical, but here again, as so often before, the institutional Church fails to satisfy that hunger. What he encounters in the rest of the passus is not a rejuvenation of the Church as spiritual guide, but rather the coming of Antichrist. In a manner which should by now be familiar to the reader of Piers Plowman, the focus of the following passages swings back and forth between the individual and societal implications of this dread appearance.[4]

The Dreamer has had trouble in finding the embodiment of Lady Holy Church on earth, but he has found in plenty the incarnations of evil. Now the summit of evil, Antichrist himself, appears, not vaguely, but "in mannes forme" (XX. 52). Truth is uprooted, and the friars and monks, those who should be in the forefront of the struggle for good, treacherously welcome him. The monasteries greet him as a conquering hero with the ringing of bells (XX. 59), a

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[4]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 127.

dire reversal of the former pealing of those bells to welcome the risen Christ on the triumphal Easter Day of Passus XIX.[5] Antichrist is here the personification of the cupidity and worldly vision which have been so evident in the Visio and the Vita, the deliberate choosing of earthly shadows rather than the true reality of the spiritual values. He bears all before him except for a few "fools" who along with St. Paul prefer the "foolishness of God" to the "wisdom of men."[6] Conscience calls these few righteous souls into Unity, the Church (XX. 75). "Kynde" (Nature), as a servant of God, sends plagues upon the earth in order to bring men to their senses (XX. 80-105), and here, surely, there is a reminiscence of the terrible Black Death which had ravaged Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. Skeat notes that "The Black Death was followed by a singular recklessness of conduct on the part of the survivors,"[8] and here in the poem as soon as the plagues relent the situation becomes even worse than before. The Church is corrupted through simony:

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[5]Lawlor, p. 180.

[6]Goodridge, p. 313, n. 4.

[7]Goodridge, p. 313, n. 5.

[8]Skeat, II, 150.

> Symonye hym [suede] to assaille Conscience,
> And [pressed on] þe [pope] and prelates þei maden
> To holden wiþ Antecrist, hir temporaltees to saue.
> (XX. 126-28).[9]

Secular justice is perverted as well, and Westminster is as corrupted as we saw it in the Visio under Lady Meed. In spite of all this, "lyf" only laughs (XX. 143), and like the Dreamer in Passus XI, lives a debased existence under the influence of Fortune. Conscience summons Elde (Old Age) to chastise such foolishness (XX. 165), but the people turn to physicians who cannot help, and receive only a "thin glass helmet," a quack remedy and a pitiful parody of the "helmet of salvation" (I Thessalonians 5:8). "They turn vainly for solace to the physician who cannot heal himself, and finally immerse themselves in earthly joy."[10] Rather than trying to prolong earthly life by medicine, they would have done better to seek healing for their souls for life eternal.

The parallel with earlier portions of the poem is even more marked when Elde attacks Will himself (XX. 183 ff.), turning the focus of the passus from the general to the specific. In his perplexity, Will is directed by Nature to turn to the Church for guidance and security (XX. 204), and, as Holy Church had said before, he is told first of all to

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[9]This is also the message of Wycliffe's De Simonia.

[10]Robertson and Huppé, p. 231.

"Lerne to loue" (XX. 208). Unfortunately, after Will has entered Unity by Contrition, in his personal experience in Unity he finds not a guide to heaven, but a corrupted institution. In this dilemma Conscience calls upon "Clergie" (Learning) for aid (XX. 228), but once again, as in Passus X, the learning encountered by the Dreamer as the vision of the poem once again widens to a societal view is the false wisdom of the university trained friars who confuse and lead astray rather than to Truth (XX. 230 ff.). These are well trained in abstruse logic, but lacking in the love which is necessary for Will and for everyone to reach salvation (XX. 250). Instead of teaching sound doctrine, the friars, once invited into Unity, continue their interest in vain philosophy and learn to defend the proposition "That alle þynges vnder heuene ouȝte to ben in comune" (XX. 276). This further reference to the "mendicant/possessioners" dispute sets the stage for disaster, for the people now find the medicine of the parish priest who demands true contrition for sin (XX. 306 ff., 359) to be too strong.[11] In endeavoring to deal with this situation, Conscience and Contrition are hoodwinked into allowing a new type of confessor into the Church, "frere Flatere"

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[11]Fitzralph in Defensio Curatorum, p. 52 f. insists that a parish priest is a better confessor than a friar, for in knowing the penitent's past life, the parish priest also knows when a harsher than usual penance is necessary because of repeated sin.

(XX. 315-16). This false confessor comes with the official blessing of the Church, for he

> . . . . . cam with hi[s] lettr[e]
> Boldely to þe bisshop and his brief hadde
> In contrees þer he coome confessions to here;
> (XX. 326-28).

Nevertheless, this last and most treacherous of the diabolical friars of Piers Plowman stands as an epitome and representative figure of the institutional Church's failure. Under his ministrations Contrition has fallen asleep, and the Christians "drede no synne" (XX. 377-79). In such a dreadful situation, Conscience can only resolve to go forth from Unity as a pilgrim to seek Piers the Plowman, who alone can remedy the situation (XX. 380-85). Conscience sets forth, crying for grace, and with this the Dreamer awakes (XX. 386).

This last line of Passus XX is the conclusion of the poem Piers Plowman, but it is not an end to the questions arising out of it. Where is Piers to be found? What form will he take? Can he be found at all, and even if he can, what is to become of the visible and institutional Church which has failed so miserably to bring the ideal of God to fulfillment among men? It is quite possible, of course, that Conscience is only seeking someone who can recall the hierarchical Church to its proper relationship to its ideal by reforming the institution, a viewpoint similar to that

found in Chaucer or Gower. Indeed, a large portion of critical opinion seems to favor this interpretation. R. W. Frank, Jr., agrees with the German scholars Glunz and Burdach that the Piers whom Conscience seeks at the end of the poem is not the eschatological Christ returning in glory, but rather an ideal pope who will reform the entire Church, especially the friars.[12] Lawlor also concludes that the Piers of Passus XX ". . . might be the Church's head, a true Pope who would destroy Pride and set the Friars in order."[13] Dunning likewise asserts that Langland is avoiding a mystic conclusion, and that out of his abiding concern for society he describes a search for a pope who can make that society truly Christian.[14] Bloomfield appears to lean toward a similar conclusion. He notes that what is called for at the poem's end is an ideal pope and an ideal king to transform society. Christ Himself certainly would fulfill both roles, but there is a strong likelihood that earthly agents are also envisioned to assume these offices.[15]

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[12]Frank, p. 117. Frank cites H. H. Glunz, Die Literar-ästhetik des europäischen Mittelalters (Bochum Langendeer: H. Pöppinghaus, 1937), pp. 533-35; Konrad Burdach, Der Dichter der Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926-32), p. 314.

[13]Lawlor, p. 185.

[14]T. P. Dunning, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, NS 7 (1956), 237.

[15]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 126.

It is, however, possible to interpret the poem's conclusion in a more radical light. Bloomfield himself notes that Conscience's call for grace at the end is really an invocation of the Holy Spirit, and that it is possible that this has some association with the Joachists' vision of a new age under the guidance of the Third Person of the Trinity.[16] Langland, of course, unlike the fraternal Joachists, would hardly be looking to the friars to inaugurate such an age, but his agonizing awareness of the corruption of all of present society could well have led him to his own adaptation of the concept of a new, purified, and quite different age to come, an age beyond the dead institutionalism of the present.

One may also note that the long passage denouncing the friars as breaking their bounds and becoming numberless as the legions of hell (XX. 253-70) introduces a characteristically Wycliffite element. Fitzralph had made a similar charge against the friars in his Defensio Curatorum, but Wycliffe gave this picture wide currency in his De Apostasia.[17] This might suggest that whatever reservations Langland may have had with Wycliffe's alterations of the historic faith, he was driven by the contemporary Church's

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[16] Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 147. See also Henry W. Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," PMLA, 53 (1938), 349.

[17] Defensio Curatorum, p. 59 f.; De Apostasia, II, 42. Both are cited in Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 146.

failure to a more sympathetic view of the radical reformer's call for a dismantling of at least some of the current ecclesiastical institutions.

Such things are possible, and the indications are there. Still, care must be taken not to read too much into such radical inferences in the poem's concluding lines. From what has been seen throughout Piers Plowman, Langland would certainly have been inclined to desire very strongly an ideal pope who could make of the Church what it should be. Seeing Piers at the end of the poem as an ideal pope accords well with the general interpretation of him as an embodiment of God's redeeming activity in earthly form. Unfortunately, Langland does not seem to have been able to find much indication that the papacy as presently constituted was moving in such an "ideal" direction. Indeed, the conflicts of the Great Schism made papal leadership of Church renewal, if anything, far less likely than before. Still, Langland certainly did not set out as a wide-eyed radical determined to sweep away the ecclesiastical institutions of the medieval world. Reform, not revolution, seems to be his basic desire.

At the same time, there is no escaping the fact that Conscience in the final passages of the poem does not find Piers within the fortress of Unity, which has clearly been identified as the Church (XIX. 328; XX. 74). The search

for the manifestation of God's saving presence on earth leads him (apparently) <u>out</u> of Unity:

> 'By crist!' quod Conscience þo, 'I wole bicome
> a pilgrym,
> And [wenden] as wide as þe world [renneþ]
> To seken Piers þe Plowman, þat pryde [myȝte]
> destruye, . . . (XX. 380-82).

It is, of course, quite possible, as some scholars have maintained,[18] that this does not imply a break with the hierarchical Church as such, and that the pilgrimage has as its aim a return to the Church of its lost spiritual purity. The mention of securing a "fyndyng" (endowment) for the friars (XX. 383) also tends in this direction. However this may be, there still remains a grave ambiguity here concerning the institutional Church, for according to traditional Christian teaching, any such search should be within the Church itself, not in the "wide world." Is the hierarchical Church so corrupted that the search for God must be conducted outside its bounds? Neither does the "fyndyng" for the friars necessarily imply a pope who will give them endowments along with the other clergy, especially when one recalls Deuteronomy 18:2, where God says to the levitical priestly tribe that they are not to have lands like the other tribes, but their inheritance is to be of a different sort: "Dominus enim ipse est haereditas eorum,"

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[18]Robertson and Huppé, p. 233; Frank, p. 117.

the Lord himself is their inheritance.[19] Once again, a "true Church" to supplant the present institution is quite within the meaning of the words.

In this regard, the words of Need in the opening sections of Passus XX may also be recalled. On the literal level these lines have to do with Will's overscrupulous refusal to beg for food even though he is starving.[20] Need does not approve of "begging" in general, but does assert that in a question of life and death, man is enjoined to take what he requires, though no more, from whatever source may be available. Frank is certainly correct in maintaining Langland's rejection of this principle as it was wrongly applied by the voracious friars,[21] but the passage has intriguing implications if it may be read as applying to spiritual as well as physical hunger. That is, Will has tried to remain a faithful son of the Church, the proper provider of spiritual food. His hunger has remained unquenched, however, and in the refusal or inability of the hierarchical Church to provide the required nourishment, might he not, then, be justified in "begging" for his

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[19]Wycliffe uses this passage to refer to the clergy in this sense in Dialogus, p. 9.

[20]Goodridge, p. 313, n. 2. See Fitzralph, Defensio Curatorum, p. 80-93 (esp. p. 90) where begging is condemned except in cases of dire need.

[21]Frank, pp. 113-14. See also Fitzralph, Defensio Curatorum, pp. 40, 60 f.

spiritual food beyond the corporate Church? Such an implication of these lines is not made explicit in the poem itself, but the possibility of such a reading is strengthened by the fact that this passage is followed directly by the vision of Antichrist and the sweeping failure of the organizational Church. If so, the "Need passages" would provide a natural basis within the passus itself for the pilgrimage of Conscience with which the poem concludes.

This is certainly not to say that Langland had lost his faith in Christianity. The great vision of the crucified and glorified Christ of Passus XVIII remains. Nowhere throughout all the intricate turnings of the poem is there real doubt that Christ is indeed the savior and lord of the world. Salter is quite correct in saying that the final pilgrimage is taken with "resolve,"[22] i.e., that Langland is not at this point a man whose faith has been totally shattered and whose outlook is now unrelievedly pessimistic. The question is rather where and how the saving grace of Christ is to be made active in the lives of men on earth.

Robertson and Huppé feel that the end of the poem is a call for the collective Christian conscience, presumably that of the laity in particular, to hold fast to the truth and to do all in their power to see that the Church is finally renewed: "The only hope left for the human will is

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[22]Salter, Introduction, p. 104.

the collective force of the Christian conscience insisting that in its priests the image of Piers be found."[23] The purpose of the poem, in their view, was not merely to denounce Church abuse, such as that of the friars, but ". . . it was to arouse his readers to a realization of the immediacy of their danger in the hope that they would be stirred to action so that Piers might again walk on earth."

There is much in the poem to suggest the basic accuracy of such an analysis, for the Dreamer, like many other pious Christians faced with a corrupt institution, has been thrown time and again upon the resources of his personal conscience in the quest for Truth. Such a view, however, even if urged in favor of a genuine reform of the organizational Church, raises fundamental questions concerning the hierarchical institution. According to traditional views, the Church should stand as the intermediary between God and man, with the truth of God communicated to the faithful in an orderly manner through pope, bishops, and other clergy. Here, though, that order seems to be reversed, and the immediacy of the soul's relation to God vastly enhanced. This fact, it seems, is an abrogation of the institutional Church's necessary role in salvation, for the individual Christian is given an independent responsibility—he is

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[23]This and the following quotation are from Robertson and Huppé, p. 244. Note that these words might also be applied to Chaucer with a fair amount of accuracy.

called to save the Church, and not the other way round. What then is the ultimate function of the visible institution, and in what sense is it still to be man's guide to salvation?

Langland clearly does not envision doing away with the corporate or hierarchical Church entirely, as some of the most radical Wycliffite positions on the predestinate might imply. Yet the Church as it is simply will not do. As revealed in Piers Plowman, the earthly Church is an almost total failure—practice is quite separate from ideal. The Dreamer progresses toward salvation,

> But the forces which bring about his rise to a state of grace are not actual forces in the earthly Church; they are forces which should operate there. Similarly, the pattern of Will's salvation is a pattern of what should be, not of what is.[24]

So it is that Langland is caught in a dilemma. In common with high medieval scholasticism he has a vision of society as it should be, with the Church incorporating and transforming all of human life in the common pilgrimage to Truth. This is the "what should be." Yet in actual experience this grand vision of universal society comes apart upon the stony hearts of human cupidity. This vice infects not only "secular society," but is especially rampant within the inmost ecclesiastical circles. Of this universal defection

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[24]Robertson and Huppé, p. 241.

the friars stand for Langland, as they had for Fitzralph and Wycliffe, as the supreme example, but they are representatives for all the rest of the fallen Church. In actual life, then, the Dreamer is forced to make a distinction between the "true Church" which maintains its spiritual purity, and the false church, which boasts only the external trappings of Christianity. In effect, then, he has been forced to see the Church not just as a "righteous remnant" amongst humanity at large, but also to see the "true Church" as a remnant (and probably a small one) within the visible ecclesiastical corporation. Given the nature of human failings, such a view is perhaps necessary as a part of the ecclesiology of all sincere Christians. All men who have experienced baptism simply will not become "saints." Theologians, including Augustine and his spiritual progeny,[25] have had to recognize and deal with that fact. With Langland, however, this is not just a question of unworthy members within the Church, or even occasional defections within its hierarchy. It is with a general failure of the hierarchical Church that he must contend, a failure most pronounced among those successors of the apostles upon which the institutional Church's claims to authority are based. In such a situation, Langland's own conception of the Church must be affected, even perhaps against his

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[25]See Augustine, De Civitate Dei, I, 35 (Migne, PL, 41:46).

desire, by views in some ways similar to those of the Spiritual Franciscans and others who saw themselves as the faithful few left among the multitudes who had betrayed their true ideal.

Langland, however, was not willing to find an easy answer to this problem in a narrow sectarian elitism or a soaring ecstatic mysticism which left the world and its problems behind. He must, therefore, at the poem's end continue to seek for Piers the Plowman, who as God's representative should be able to find a solution to the paradox of the Church as remnant and universal society. Yet, as the poem closes, the direction to take and the form which this Piers will assume are not clear. None of the available ecclesiological options which the poem has considered, from pro-papalism to Wycliffism, has proved sufficient. The individual Christian must hold to his informed conscience and the true faith, but the Piers who is sought is not to be just a "mystic" extension or part of the Dreamer himself. A solution for self alone is not enough. Whatever it may be, the Church is more than the Dreamer, and therefore this Piers must have a societal and institutional (at least in the broad sense of the word) application. As Bloomfield so aptly observes: "But Piers is sought to save Holy Church, not primarily to save Will."[26]

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[26]Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 105.

At the poem's end this dilemma remains, and there is a dilemma, Vasta and others who say that Will's goal is reached notwithstanding.[27] The problem is a most difficult one, and man by himself cannot hope to find the answer. Divine assistance is required, and therefore Conscience's great cry for grace (XX. 386) with which the Dreamer awakes is the inevitable conclusion of Piers Plowman.

In many respects, then, Langland's vision of Piers Plowman ends where it began, with a pilgrimage. The Dreamer has made progress in experience, knowledge, and spiritual enlightenment, but many issues remain unresolved. The question naturally arises as to whether the work is truly finished, or simply broken off as so often before in its course the Dreamer's progress was interrupted by an obstacle only to be resumed again. Skeat, whose opinions still command respect, maintains that the end of the poem as we have it is precisely the final ending as Langland intended it to stand, citing as proof of this the inclusion of the final two passus in the C-Text in virtually unaltered form. "What other ending can there be?", he asks.[28] This is a question which eludes a final answer, but Donaldson as usual offers intriguing food for thought. In characterizing the author of Piers Plowman he says:

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[27]Vasta, p. 139.

[28]Skeat, II, xxiv, lvi.

> I believe we have to deal with but one poet who remained ever discontent with what he had accomplished, and, to the end of his life, kept striving to write in the way God wished—ex ordine quo Deo voluit.[29]

Donaldson further supposes that Langland died before he could finish his revisions of the last portion of the poem for the C-Text.[30] This raises the interesting possibility that the end of the poem as we have it is not a conclusion in the usual sense. One should also note that Skeat himself was able to trace in the manuscripts of Piers Plowman not just the three main versions with which we are familiar, but at least ten separate stages of the work leading from one version to another.[31] This certainly lends credence to the possibility that the C-Text is not as finished as Skeat thought, but is rather another intermediate text on the way to another major version of the poem. One might even be so bold as to wonder if "C" would have led to "D," and "D" to "E," etc. if the poet had lived longer.

Such musings must remain only conjecture, but they fit well with what the poet has revealed of himself in his work which we do have. As Coghill notes, Langland at the end of the A-Text had reached a crisis concerning the value of learning in salvation, and finding no way out of this

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[29]Donaldson, C-Text, p. 198.

[30]Donaldson, C-Text, p. 197. See also Carruthers, pp. 171-72 for further agreement with this view.

[31]Skeat, II, xxii.

dilemma had "not so much finished as finished off his poem."[32] Langland, however, was not content to let the matter lie, and out of "a long musing over that enigmatic but crucial Pardon granted to Piers" the deeper B-Text was born.[33] Now at the end of the "B" and "C" versions there exists a similar dilemma concerning the nature and function of the Church, a dilemma which the fractured and self-contradictory disputes of fourteenth century ecclesiology intensified but offered little help in solving.

Throughout the poem, Langland has taken up current views of the Church only to find each wanting in one way or another. Likewise he has involved himself in other closely related issues, such as predestination and evangelical poverty, in which fourteenth century theologians chose to do battle from their varying ecclesiological perspectives. These are parts of the larger question of the nature of the Church, and in their baffling complexity sometimes serve to obscure rather than illuminate the central concern. Through it all, Langland has revealed himself as an utterly dedicated Christian who yearns for the "medieval" security of an Augustine or an Aquinas, but who must face the reality of a post-Ockhamistic age in which it is less easy to be

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[32]Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Anthology, p. 60.

[33]Coghill, "The Pardon of Piers Plowman," in Blanch, Anthology, p. 40.

certain that answers to one's questions indeed exist. Adding to this intellectual dilemma is the moral dilemma which likewise tortured Bishop Brinton, i.e., the defection of Christians from whatever "ideal" Church which may still be posited to exist. It is obviously not possible to say for sure whether Langland intended to go on to wrestle with all these problems further, and there is in any case much to suggest that such ideal/temporal and remnant/universal society dilemmas cannot receive a perfect solution in this imperfect world. Neither can one say for sure whether the sought-after Piers would have been an ideal pope, or whether, just as Wycliffe was driven by continued hierarchical opposition to more and more radical views of the Church, Langland himself would have been driven by continued failures of the organizational Church to seek a Piers of a more revolutionary ecclesiological sort.

On the basis of what has been said above, however, it is possible to view with somewhat more appreciation the opinions of those nineteenth century scholars who, while they recognized in Langland a soul whose basic desire was for a pure form of medieval Catholicism, not the radical Christianity of the Wycliffites, nevertheless insisted that his work is a milestone on the way to the Reformation.[34]

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[34]For lengthy excerpts from several of these scholars, Whitaker and Wright in particular, see Skeat, II, xxxviii-liii.

Dean Milman, writing in 1855, though he expresses a strongly Protestant point of view in a rather bombastic style, came close to seizing the crucial issue of the poem's ecclesiology:

> It is not so much in his keen cutting satire on all matters of the Church as his solemn installation of Reason and Conscience as the guides of the self-directed soul, that he is breaking the yoke of sacerdotal domination. . . . The sad serious Satirist, in his contemplation of the world around him, the wealth and the woe, sees no hope, but in a new order of things, in which if the hierarchy shall subsist, it shall subsist in a form, with powers, in a spirit totally opposite to that which now rules mankind. The mysterious Piers the Ploughman seems to designate from what quarter that Reformer is to arise. . . .[35]

Milman is quite right in seeing the Dreamer at the end of Piers Plowman as essentially a soul alone, left to work out his salvation in a direct relationship with God without much assistance from the hierarchical Church. This direct and personal, rather than institutional, relationship with the Savior was truly the cornerstone of the later Reformation, and heralded "a new order of things." In this sense, Langland is definitely a precursor of the Reformation. What Milman does not seem to realize, however, is how desperately the questing soul of Piers Plowman has revealed itself not to want to be left alone before God, but has rather sought, and continues to seek, an understanding or manifestation of the Church on earth which could provide

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[35]Skeat, II, li.

authority and guidance for salvation. It might be, as noted above, that continued failure of the organizational Church to provide this authority and guidance would have forced Langland's thought into greater accord with more radical ecclesiologies, but as the poem ends, the resolution of this dilemma is not attained. What is certain is that the Church in all its ideal and temporal manifestations was a major concern of Langland, and that his search for a viable ecclesiology fills, and often shapes, his poem from first to last as he seeks an authoritative answer to that question of questions: "How may I save my soul?"

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